

freepaper

Imagine



"Imagine there's no heaven, it's easy if you try,
No hell below us, above us only sky."

Where are you now, John?

Imagine
You may say I'm a dreamer



I'm Not the Only One



I was thirteen years old when the Beatles rocked America in 1964, appearing on the Ed Sullivan show three consecutive Sunday nights. They were the spark that catapulted the '60's into full-scale revolution. Everything else that followed was just a matter of time: free love, anti-establishment protests, abandonment of the status quo, doing your own thing, and everything else under the sun. The restraint had been lifted and we were a generation ready to live life to the fullest, and to prove to everybody that a life of love could work ...just give peace a chance.

Imagine
I hope someday you'll join us

It was John Lennon who had the mind to conceive of much of the philosophy that underlied the Beatles' music and the boldness to make social and political statements about what he saw and thought.

MORE POPULAR THAN JESUS

I remember what a shock it was to middle America when John Lennon proclaimed in 1966 that, "The Beatles are more popular than Jesus."

Southern radio stations banned their songs and teenagers held bonfires to burn Beatle records and prove, in fact, that what John had said wasn't true. But it *was* true back then that the Beatles were more popular than the Jesus portrayed by mainstream religions. Arrogant as their claim was, the astounding thing was that John Lennon said it. It stunned people and they reacted to it, one way or the other.

The real question should have been, "Could it be true? How could it be that the Beatles were more popular than the man who promised eternal life to those who believe in Him and obey His word?" Could it be that what John Lennon was saying was more real than what the Christian ministers were offering?

What John Lennon hoped for and called upon all of us to *imagine* existed only once and lit up the earth with love for only a brief, but shining moment that shook the world. It was when the man Yahshua established the first actual community by leaving His eternal Spirit with His followers after He died and rose from the dead. By His life, the man Yahshua brought the life of heaven here to earth. Gradually the early communities drifted away from simple obedience and fervent love for their Messiah and for one another. The vibrant life of the communities evaporated, to be replaced by the lifeless liturgy and stale institutionalism that is Christianity today. That dry husk is what John Lennon called us to abandon – and to imagine something better, something real in its place.

FAKE RELIGION

Many responded to John Lennon's appeal. Everyone was preoccupied with looking for what was true and real and actual. No one wanted anything fake and everybody had to find out for themselves. Fake religion, for sure, was something to be avoided at all costs.

John Lennon spoke a lot about what was wrong. He tried to find out what was right and kept the world abreast of what he found as he travelled from one experiment to the next. Nothing stuck. By the time of his new album in 1971, what he was left with was an invitation for us to *Imagine*. Imagine no heaven and no hell, imagine

Imagine

And the world will be as one

no countries, imagine no possessions; also imagine all the people living for today, living life in peace and sharing all the world. We did imagine it.

It was as if all you had to do was *imagine* it. Everyone tried, but nobody found that imaginary place where everyone lived so lovingly.

At least John had the hope that the world would be as one. But he never found a way to realize it. He hoped that "someday you'll join us," but he never made it clear who "us" was. Probably he meant the dreamers.

WHO ARE THE DREAMERS?

So, twenty-some years later, who are the dreamers? Are there any left? Is anyone out there saying, "Come join *US* because we've found the way!"?

Yes! We are. I am. It is happening and I am a part of it. I remember December 8, 1980, when John Lennon died at forty and something in my heart cried for him that there was no hope left for him anymore.

I'm glad there was still hope for me. There is still hope for you. Since 1985, when I found the way that all of us in the communities who write this paper have found, I have often wished I could tell John Lennon, "Imagine ... it's for real!"

I appreciated what John saw, because I saw it too. So much of what he said rang true for a whole generation. He saw through religion. The way Christianity depicted heaven and hell, what was the point of having it? Believing in it didn't change the way people treated each other, did it?

The same with politics. The best intentions of world governments didn't hold any promise either. The new one was always at least as bad as the old one. Democracies didn't produce the justice he imagined, and neither did dictators.

LEARNING TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER?

He posed the question that maybe if there was nothing to kill or die for, then, just maybe then, people would love one another. Maybe, *if there was nothing else to do except love one another*, maybe then, we'd learn to do it! There would be no greed or hunger – only a true brotherhood of man where all the people shared what they had.

Why doesn't it ever happen that way? Why doesn't the dream come true? John Lennon was right: he wasn't the only dreamer back then ... and he's not the only dreamer now.

I'm not the only one either. There are many. Are you one of them? If you are, come to see the solution that John Lennon could only *Imagine*. I hope someday you'll join *US* ... we're for real! ☺

Imagine
Imagine all the people



Living for today

I'm walking the streets alone wondering where everyone is. All of a sudden I hear some loud music. "Imagine there's no heaven, It's easy if you try, No hell below us, Above us only sky ..." I knock on the door and all my friends are there. I'm told if I don't eat this amber eighth-inch square of plastic I have to leave. I eat it. About forty-five minutes later the voices sound farther and farther away. The walls look like they are breathing,

the sidewalks look like flowing rivers and the...

Twenty years, seventeen jobs and three divorces later: I'm sitting in a concert parking lot. Three guys walk up and start talking about a life of love, a life of unity, a life of real happiness. They tell me about how Yahshua died for my sins, about how death could not hold Him. They tell me what I need to do to have the same life. An intense sense of peace overcomes me. Maybe someday you'll join us. Then the world will live as one. ☺

Dennis



Imagine
Imagine all the people



Roots

*Do we have the roots in the foundation
of our lives to bring the vision
of Imagine into reality?*

The energy, vision, and passion expressed in the song *imagine*, will never be forgotten. But there is still a lingering question in the hearts of those who gave their all to make it happen – why did the vision that John Lennon kindled in our imaginations never come about? Why is the world still full of strife and hatred and war and greed and hunger? This question is in the hearts of those also who know nothing of the inspiring and difficult time of the sixties, for the world of the nineties offers no hope of real solutions, not even in our imagination.

MIDDLE-CLASS ROOTS

What happened to the enlightened sixties generation is a classic example of what has happened from one generation to another down through history. The majority of the children of the sixties came from middle-class families with middle-class roots and middle-class values ingrained in them since childhood. These were the children who, in their generation, were most affected by the song *Imagine*.

This song, along with many others in that era, caused a whole generation to frantically throw off their parents' values in an attempt to be free from the traditional restraints that seemed to hinder the life we imagined from coming into being. But all the LSD trips, the intellectual enlightenment, all the swelling emotions charged by prophets like John Lennon couldn't break us free. The new values, created by us as we searched out our destiny, didn't get us any farther toward the goal than the ones we left behind.

The power to break free from the rotten, selfish seed that was passed on to us from our middle-class fathers was not there. So as we got older, our need for middle-class comforts began to outweigh our desire for a better world. The fears we had of trusting those over thirty was a forewarning of what we'd to like in a few short years. It proved to be true. By the time we reached thirty, we lost our fire, our zeal for the uncompromising life we imagined was possible.

Our voice was silenced after we got what our parents wanted for us all along – security, success, becoming a valuable asset to the prized heritage of middle-class living. It had its new age flavor, but the bottom line is that the sixties generation became a part of the same life we protested against, the one John Lennon exposed two decades ago.



The sixties children couldn't get out of the snare they saw their parents in years before. All of the sixties exteriors eventually wore off, exposing the roots that were still there. It is like wearing a mask that you think is really you, but when you pull it off, you see that underneath the mask, you're just a businessman trying to make a living, just surviving like your daddy did before you. The same enemies your daddy had, the ones you swore you would never tolerate are right there in front of your eyes when you take a close and honest look at what you agree to, just to make it in the world.

You are what you are. You can't escape the fallen seed that's been passed on to you from your father. That nature is inherent. You got it from your daddy and you'll give it to your son. You'll say you won't make the same mistakes that your daddy made, but no matter how hard you try, no matter how conscientious you are, the same rotten stuff will surface in your seed, too.

To realize that what is in you is no different from what is in your parents and what will eventually surface in your children, is the first step to the open door to freedom. The roots in us go all the way back to the first man, Adam. The seed of corruption entered the human race way back then, in the beginning. It is a curse, spiritual death. It's hard to face the reality, but you have to face the truth of your roots if you want to have hope. You have to face the fact that you live every day under the curse of death. The things that you hate in yourself are the very things you can't change. That's what makes it a curse. It can't be lifted by mere human effort. The old roots have to be completely cut off. They must be completely done away with. You have to find the one who has the power to undo the curse. You have to find a way to get rid of your old cursed life, the one that will end up in the eternal state of conscious death.



A NEW SEED

What you need is a new seed, a radically new life, eternal life. Yahshua was the first man who possessed that new seed. He is the source of eternal life for all who obey Him. In fact, He is eternal life. He willingly took your old cursed life upon Himself. With the burden of that life upon Him, He went willingly into eternal death for you. He took your place so that He could give you His eternal life. This is the only escape from the roots of sin and death that hold you and the whole human race in chains. Unless you take this escape, you are destined to repeat the same mistakes over and over again.

Yahshua proved that He has the power to break the old root in us and give us a new beginning. If anyone has His life and spirit breathed into him, he will enter into a life with others that *Imagine* only envisioned. This life is real, actual. You can find it. It exists! It is only a seed here in this age, but this seed will usher in the real new age where Yahshua will rule over the entire earth, and His life in us will fill it forever. ☺

Imagine
No hell below us



Above Us Only Sky

The song Imagine raised some provocative questions suggesting how we could love one another better. It exposed the things that divide people, that seem to keep the whole world from coming together. If we could do away with religion and greed, it would go a long way toward eliminating wars. And if we could just abandon the institutions that had held humanity in bondage for centuries, keeping people from living up to their full human potential, then we could live for today, in peace, sharing the whole world with each other, living as one.



Imagine
Imagine all the people
living for today

What John Lennon was groping for in the imaginings of his song was *life*, something he was unable to possess, unable to live. From the time he wrote the song until the day he died, he could not cast off the chains of greed and jealousy from his own personal life, nor did he see a clear path for mankind to escape from the stinking quagmire that engulfs man's soul.

Are we any closer today to experiencing the life John imagined? If all that is above us is only sky, then where is life going to come from? It surely can't come from more self effort. Even the most enlightened and educated, who are examples of developing their human potential to its fullest, don't treat each other the way John envisioned in his song.

LIVING IN THE TRUTH

Our only hope is that there is someone above us who can give us life. No, not loving by principle, not striving to do the right thing, but *living every day in the truth* (John 14:6). The truth is that what John described in his song

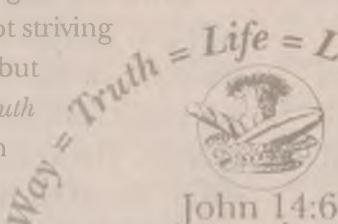
was the need for life, which he could only imagine if we did away with greed, hunger, possessions, killing, and religion, the inescapable evidence that the human race lives in a state of spiritual death.

There is no *natural* way out of this condition. That's why all attempts by man always fail. You don't have to look very far to see that mankind lives in a state of spiritual death.

THE REALITY OF LIFE

The opposite of death is life. The life John Lennon longed for in the song is *eternal life*, life from heaven, from another source than what man is trapped in here and now. It is not enough for John to see it in the imagination of his mind and soul. We've seen it too – we've imagined it as John asked us to – in this generation for the last twenty-five years, but it has not brought us into the reality of life that begins now and lasts, that endures without end, that bears the good fruit of love and unity and justice in people's everyday existence.

No matter how much a person sees, no matter how clear his concepts are, no matter how much he strives for it, it does not transfer him out of the eternal state of death that he lives in every day and that he will continue to experience in an excruciating way after he dies. The only way out of this condition is the intervention of the eternal God, the Creator of the universe, the One who created the sky above us.



God sent eternal life to earth when He sent His Son, Yahshua, to dwell among us. What made Him different was that He *was* eternal life. The life and message He brought to earth was a life that humans knew nothing about. All mankind, like John Lennon, could only sense within themselves a deep longing for this eternal life, but could not get it and did not know where to find it.

RADICAL LOVE

Yahshua was radical. He had a love for people that came out in the way He treated them. Those who came in contact with Him knew they had never seen a life like this ever before. What He possessed was a life foreign to this age, foreign to the ways people had related to one another since time began. His life exposed for the first time the eternal death that the whole human race was trapped in. When individuals would ask Him, "What must I do to get this eternal life that dwells in you?" His answers were crushing. His words would expose the selfish motives of their hearts. The more perfected a person was by his natural strength, the more he would grind his teeth at what this Yahshua said.

He told all men that in order to have eternal life, one must give up his life in this present age. Everything that was life to him, he had to give up. He had to

want the life Yahshua possessed enough to give up everything else in order to have it. It was life for life. There was no way that anyone could have the life of Yahshua and have his own life at the same time. It was one or the other.

The sincere had no problem with what He told them. They realized that what they thought was life was really death. They knew that they were abiding in death. John Lennon knew the same thing. He knew that there were things in him and in the whole human race that were corrupt. He even told us in his songs that he was a jealous guy who was crippled inside. His soul was distressed by the effect of sin on man. He couldn't escape all the things he sang about in the song. Anybody who is real sees the same things in himself.

LIFE OR DEATH

So the real issue that confronted the people in Yahshua's day was life or death. Did they have life or did they have death? Everything boils down to this one critical question. The question is the same today: it is an eternal question with eternal consequences for each of us. In Yahshua's day, those who admitted that they were living in eternal death believed in Him and obeyed His message. They abandoned their lives and followed Him. Those who loved their lives, who loved liv-

Imagine

ing for themselves, murdered Him. They proved that they were living under the curse of eternal death and that their spiritual father was the accuser, the source of all evil.

They murdered Him because He brought the life of another kingdom to earth. Those who loved living in the chains of the evil prince that rules this present world order rejected this life He offered. They wanted to wipe it off the face of the earth. Yahshua was rejected by the ones He came to rescue. The majority in His day chose death over life. Only a few chose life. Only a few followed Him, and they, too, were rejected and murdered, treated as strangers and aliens on this earth.

In the song *Imagine*, John Lennon was crying out in his heart for eternal life, a life that would be evident here and now by love among a people. He didn't know that he was looking for eternal life because the Christian church proclaimed an eternal life that John knew was a hoax. He didn't even consider the possibility because of the corrupting influence of Christianity that has polluted the whole world. John Lennon knew that the God of Christianity and the life of their heaven was not the life he imagined in his

heart. The example of the Christian church didn't even come close to the longing for reality reflected in his song.

Christianity couldn't give John Lennon eternal life because they did not have it themselves. If they had eternal life, he would have been able to see a demonstration of it among them. It would have been the fulfillment of the

ETERNAL – *without beginning or end, existing through all time, everlasting, timeless, forever the same, always true or valid, unchangeable, never stopping, perpetual.*

life he sang about. Eternal life embodies all that *Imagine* expresses and more, much more. It is a vast life of love and unity and justice, and

if eternal life is actually in a people, it will be evident by the fruit their lives produce.

Eternal life has to be *given* to man. It was an act of kindness and mercy that God offered to give us eternal life. Yahshua proved the nature of eternal life by demonstrating to us a love that lays its life down for others. This is what He did when He died on the cross for our sins. He actually took our place in eternal death. He paid the penalty of death that we so richly deserved. This is how far he went to show us the love that is the essence of eternal life. This eternal life in Yahshua starts now and never ends. You don't have to wait until you die to taste it. You can have it now. ☺

No Heaven, No Hell

It was better than
the Christian view
of eternity with its
heartless doctrine of
who goes where

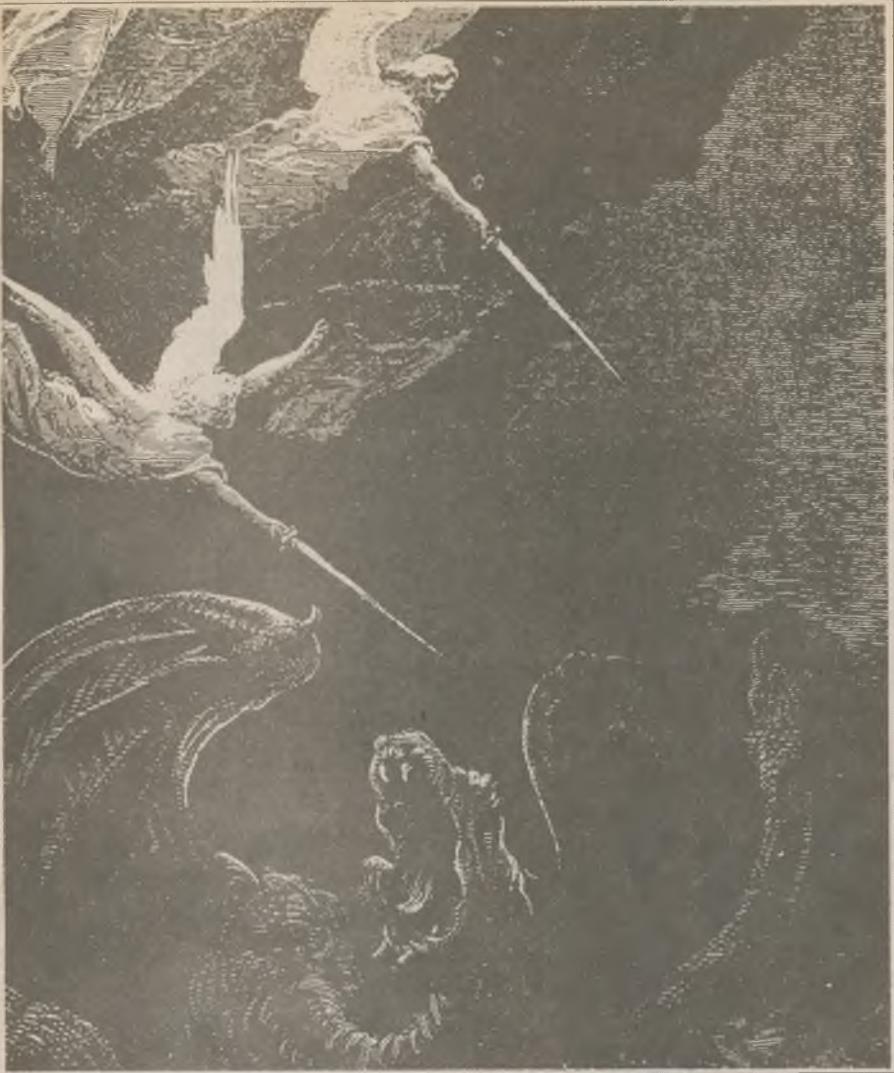


John Lennon's thought-provoking lyrics caused us to consider what heaven and hell did to people. What happened when it no longer mattered how people treated others, since their ticket to heaven was assured? Had it brought more compassion into the world, or did it shield people from the suffering of others? Even though the first-century believers had turned the world upside down, since then Christians have been busy keeping the world right-side up. John Lennon hated that. He couldn't



stand how the preachers sent the boys off to war. He railed against a system that talked about a man who gave up all he had, and comforted those who held onto everything. In his song he challenged the moral authority of Christianity:

*Imagine there's no heaven;
It's easy if you try.
No hell below us;
Above us only sky ...*



I vividly remember sitting in third grade asking my teacher, who was a nun, a question I very much wanted an answer to. How is it, I had wanted to know, that God could allow people to be born whom He knew He was going to throw into hell? I asked this with all the innocent passion an eight year old could muster. How could God, who is supposed to be good and merciful, cast people into hell who had never heard of Jesus Christ? At the time it was the most important thing in the world to me. She deflected my

question with an answer I have heard since then in many different ways.

"Some things," she told me, "are mysteries. We are not to know why – only to trust."

Years later, when John Lennon told us to imagine, his words struck a resonant chord within me. Was it really fair to favor with eternal life those who had a Bible or a television preacher or a fine car to drive to church every Sunday, and condemn to everlasting fire those who hadn't? I kept on thinking about the thousands of generations of Chinese who'd never even heard of a Bible, let alone Jesus. What about them, I wondered? Maybe there was nothing up there but sky. I used to

think about going out to the woods when it was time to die. Then my body could decompose and at least enrich the earth like the leaves did which fell every year. Then my death would be a natural part of the circle of life, like everything else was, except man.

A friend of mine and I were standing near the lake on campus. We were talking when up came a Christian evangelist warning us, in his earnest way, of coming judgment. I don't know whether it was embarrassment or nervousness that I felt,

but I couldn't hear a word he said. It was like when the P.A. system in school broke – all I could hear was a buzzing in my ears. In a way I was pleased to be so seemingly unaffected. My friend and I laughed and went on. Later I saw his name in the newspaper. He'd gotten himself arrested for being such a pest. Served him right, I thought to myself.

TRAPPED

Next year I had a Christian for a roommate. He'd turned his back on being a trumpet player because the life of a musician was so unstable. I often wondered whether he'd made the right choice. Instead he wanted to be an accountant like his father. Still, he was a likeable guy, and we used to study together till late in the night. Then it happened, the thing I feared more than anything else. He found this campus minister who could out-talk me. Like a bird freezes before a snake, I helplessly debated with this man, throwing all my puffballs of reasoning at him. He cheerfully batted them away because, not only was he intelligent, he was funny. Like a spider dashing in to loop another strand around her prey, he knocked my arguments and defenses down, one by one. I felt like I was fighting for my life and this guy got me to laugh about it.

Trapped. I was trapped. If I didn't believe in Jesus I was going to hell. If I did believe I would be a Christian. Which was

worse? What was I to do? I didn't want to be a Christian. I'd gotten fed up with Catholicism growing up; the last thing I wanted was to become born again. I would never, ever wear an "I Found It" button.

Then there was my conscience. I'd done plenty of bad things all right, but becoming a Christian hadn't been one of them. At least I hadn't betrayed the eight year old boy I'd once been. He had demanded an answer to the central question the Christian gospel raises – is God just? At least I wasn't a hypocrite. But what if I was going to hell? What if they were right? Was there any way back to just living life in peace like I used to do, scorning Christians and minding my own business?

Finally my head won out over my heart. It made no sense to go to hell when it was so simple to go to heaven. What did it really matter what happened to all those other people? After all, God was just – it said so right there in the Bible. Does an insect resign itself to the spider's embrace, or just get worn out? In either case the venom goes home and the struggle ends. I said the sinner's prayer and I stopped letting things bother me so much. I had joined the biggest in-crowd in the world, Christianity. I was one of the elect.

Like every other human being I had been looking for love. Not just a God who would love me, but one I could give my whole affection to. It is like when a young



man wants to marry, there is a powerful motivation in him to love a woman and give his heart to her. But what happens if he purchases the false affection of a harlot, instead of keeping himself for his bride? The memory of his actions, and the guilt of them, will always stand between him and his wife. That same kind of defilement flooded my soul when I said the "sinner's prayer," because I knew I was not committing my whole life to God. I knew that my Christian life would not resemble in the *slightest* the church in the book of Acts, when the Holy Spirit had been freshly poured out. You can't buy love, but you can pay someone to say, "I love you." That's what I did, and the damage worked its way into my soul like a gnawing worm that is never satisfied.

Some essential part of my humanity died as I learned more and more about the "free gift of salvation". It does something to you to be saved so cheaply when, for so many, life is a grim struggle to survive. I remember the unease I felt when reading what a popular Christian evangelist said, "A Buddhist may be a better person than a Christian, but a Christian is forgiven and a Buddhist isn't." The unspoken conclusion was that it didn't matter what kind of life you led. I sensed there was something wrong with such thinking, but no one could tell me exactly what.

SAVED FROM AN ANGRY GOD

Like a dying man passes in and out of consciousness, my conscience would stir and condemn me for what I had done. How could I have anything to do with this Chris-

tian God who is so harsh in judgment? Is he any better than a murderer for throwing into hell people who did the best they could by the light they had? I would quote Bible verses to myself and read Christian books on predestination until I could carry on again. So my life lurched along as I tried to make my church a light to the world and sent lots of money to help missionaries overseas. If they didn't get to the natives before God did, then there was no hope for them. God would have no mercy because they were sinners. How thankful I was, I told myself, to be saved from such an angry God.



ANOTHER MYSTERY

I probably could have gone on in this uneasy condition indefinitely, although the social life of Christianity was wearing thin. There was such little difference between it and the world. I found it easier and easier to enjoy the things I used to before I became a Christian. It was becoming obvious to me that only my thoughts had changed, not my life. This, I was told, nonetheless meant I was glory bound. When I asked my pastor how come the life of the New Testament believers was so different from Christianity today, how come they gave up everything just like their Savior did, and we live in the lap of luxury, the answer I received was: that was for those days. I guessed it was another one of



those mysteries – how it could possibly be that we both enjoyed the same salvation? It had cost them so much and it cost us so little.

Some little seed of hope kept me from giving up altogether. Way down there somewhere was the thought that maybe God was good and just and He would judge everyone fairly. I knew for sure I wasn't better than anyone else. Neither altar call nor river baptism seemed to have any more effect than when I was sprinkled by the priest a few days after my birth. I had been declared the spiritual property of the Catholic Church by this rite, and set on an unalterable path to the pearly gates. The Catholics get their dibs in early, dispensing with all the emotional trauma of conversion experiences. It really is simpler that way, and in the long run both Catholics and Protestants provide the same answers. They both live the same lives as well, practically indistinguishable from the rest of the world. Their lives certainly have nothing to do with the life of the age to come.

If only Christians lived like the first church in Jerusalem so long ago. I respected

those people because they had actually done what their Savior told them to. They shared everything they had, even their food. Those with property sold it to meet the needs of their poor brothers until it could be truthfully said there were no rich or poor among them. These people dropped everything to be devoted to their Master's teaching and to prayer. They loved to be with one another. Sadly, however, it seemed as though that life had perished long ago. Was what was recorded in the Bible in

Acts two and four just another *Imagine* song? The people who sang it now had no intention of doing what they said. They were like John Lennon, who only imagined, but didn't have the power or find the place where he could give up his possessions.

FINDING GOD'S PEOPLE

At just the right time, before I abandoned my life to self-centered cynicism and selfishness, the real, true God brought me to His people. There I learned I was a sinner, just like the Christians said. I had done many things that I knew were wrong. By doing such evil things as defying my parents, fornicating, hating, lustng, and living only for myself, it was as if I had signed a contract with the devil. He was faithfully leading me to eternal destruction. My sojourn into Christianity neither dismayed nor disturbed him in the least. The unfaithful, compromised, grasping system of Christianity has never saved anyone. Only obeying the gospel Yahshua preached can do that.

Imagine
Above us only sky

IMAGINE NO POSSESSIONS

To become His disciple you have to first give up all your own possessions. Maybe John Lennon thought of Him when he wrote his song. But Yahshua did what He expected His followers to do. It was so simple, even a child could understand it. You had to die to yourself, leave everything behind – because nothing was worthwhile compared to Him – and follow Him wherever He went. This is exactly what His early disciples did. It takes great complexities of reasoning to imagine that it is any different today. Rejecting His message today is motivated by the same love of the world that caused people to reject Him when He was alive.

A hypocrite can't teach anyone to be sincere. The callous can't teach others to be sensitive. The unjust can't teach about justice. Christianity can't teach about the true God, because it openly teaches disobedience to His word. John Lennon should not have had to *imagine* no possessions. He should have been able to see a living demonstration of it all over the world. As the gospel became cheaper and cheaper, all that was left was an other-worldly salvation for the dues-paying members, and unspeakable damnation for everyone else. They had gone so far from their roots that a rock-and-roll star intuitively understood more of God's character and what He desires for mankind than they did.

NO HEAVEN AND NO HELL

One day there will be no heaven and one day there will be no hell. They will both be gone forever. Heaven will come to earth, and hell

will be cast into the Sea of Fire, a place that was never meant for man. It was prepared for the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41). Those who did evil will rise from the grave to go to the second, unending death of the Sea of Fire. Instead of the smug, self-important heaven of Christianity, eternity will be bursting with life. Those who persevered in doing good will have a second, unending life in what the Bible calls the nations (Revelation 21:24). They will parent happy children who will fill the galaxies with life. This will bring thanksgiving to Him from all generations forever and ever (Ephesians 3:21). And ruling over the nations will be those who chose to follow Him in this life. They will be with Him forever in the Holy City (Revelation 22:3-5).

That is the choice I made. Now I have another memory to wash away the pain that pierced my soul as a child. That pain was the nameless, dreadful fear that life was meaningless, a sorry joke, with Christians having the last laugh. But when I learned that God is fair and just, I stood weeping, exulting at the goodness and mercy of God. Now my salvation no longer requires that I compromise the essential humanity God Himself put in me. I am part of a people who serve the God who truly does love the world. ☺



Judgment

*Shall not the Judge
of all the earth
deal justly?*

AFTER THE GREAT search has been made, and each person's life carefully examined to see if there was anything for which they could be rewarded, only the worthless will go to the Sea of Fire. The compassion that motivated God to send His Son will not be withheld from those who were kind to their neighbors and hospitable to strangers. The least act of kindness shown to a disciple will be remembered. As Yahshua himself said:

And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly I say to you, he shall not lose his reward.

(Matthew 10:42)

That reward will not be merely "the coolest room in hell." How much our idea of judgment has been twisted and warped by



people who don't know God's character! Where do such ideas come from?

In Dante's *Inferno* are levels of hell for increasingly evil people. There, punishments and tortures tailored to the offense are dished out with sadistic glee by crazed, yet tireless, demons. They are the agents of God's wrath. Whatever the source, ideas like this have affected the whole world. The typical idea of hell is enough to frighten children into screaming nightmares.

Since God is the Judge who put people in hell, it is as if God is a sadist, just waiting to get a hold of all those stubborn people

Imagine

who would not become Christians. And what of the children who die young and the infants? What is their fate? There is a reason behind the existence of Vacation Bible Schools. It is the same thinking that causes preachers to try to get children to say the sinner's prayer. Yes, it's because they are going to hell forever and ever if they don't believe in Jesus.

While a person's normal sense of decency and justice would tell them that children can't be judged like adults, that is not what Christianity teaches. Worse still is the doc-

trine of infant damnation. It is hidden like a shameful secret that no one wants to bring out of the closet. Even though babies have not done anything good or bad, they are born in sin, aren't they? *Why do you think so many people baptize their babies?* It is because they have been taught, even if they are hardly aware of it that their baby will go to hell if it dies. Such knowledge is too terrible to put into thoughts, let alone words.

The classic Protestant expression of this doctrine is in the *Day of Doom*, the most famous poem of colonial days. It pictured in-

Imagine
No hell below us

fants pleading for mercy before Jesus at the Judgment Seat. His answer still chills the soul:



*None but
mine elect
can I save.
But to you
this boon
will I grant:
The coolest
room in hell.*

And Catholics have their “limbo”, just outside of hell, for unbaptized babies. The whole of Christianity is a religion that preys on people’s deepest fears, offering a seeming security against the murderous god it has created. Right at the beginning of life the net of fear and guilt is laid, and generation after generation is caught in its sickening grasp.

It is GOOD NEWS to hear that God is not that way at all. Yahshua taught that there is a place of comfort and a place of torment in death. He told about two men who had died to illustrate this concept in vivid terms:

Now it came about that the poor man died and he was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades [death] he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away, and Lazarus [the poor man he had ignored] in his bosom ...

Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things, but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony."

(Luke 16:22,23,25)

Whoever has even once failed to love his neighbor as himself has sinned and will be held in death. The agony and suffering of death is the price you pay for sin. Some will suffer with the rich man, because that is how they treated people too. But God is just, and the people who struggled to live a good, moral life will not suffer in death as much as those who deliberately defied their consciences. Job spoke of the hope of the second life for those who die with a good conscience:

*If a man dies, will he live again?
All the days of my struggle I will wait,
until my change comes.
You will call, and I will answer You;
You will long for the work of Your hands.*

(Job 14:14,15)

Human beings are the work of His hands, they are His highest creation. Sadly, God will not long for everyone. He will not desire anyone He can no longer recognize. These will have destroyed the image of God in themselves by their evil, willful actions. As children look and act like their parents, so we were meant to reflect the moral goodness of our Creator. People who choose immoral-

Imagine
Above us only sky

ity, greed, and a life of selfish ease end up mirroring the evil one, not their Maker. They will not be allowed to bring that ingrained evil into eternity. Instead of the second life, they will justly be condemned to the second, unending death.

But there will be so many He will desire. Among them will be all the aborted babies, and all the children who never had a chance in this life. All the people who did the best they could, by the light they had in their consciences, will be there. Even though they did not have the opportunity to believe in Messiah, they did take the opportunities they had to be kind to their neighbors.

The Son of God spoke about the judgment. He told His disciples that God was impartial. He knew they would be surprised to hear it. They had grown up despising everyone outside of Israel. Perhaps He looked ahead to the slander of God's character that Christianity would do as well. He had told them:

Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who did the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. (John 5:28,29)

This judgment will take place at the dawn of the eternal age. It will do away with, once and for all, every trace of injustice.

Only such a judgment can ever do away with evil, for evil lives in the hearts of men who do not value a good conscience. Such men and women will go to eternal punishment. But also on that day, Yahshua will say to the righteous people of all nations:

Come, you who are blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.

(Matthew 25:34)

There, in the nations of the eternal age, they will receive the direct care and healing of the God of Heaven:

And on either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree of life were for the healing of the nations.

(Revelation 22:2)

He also promised that His bondservants, those who have forsaken everything to serve Him in this life, will eat the fruit of the tree of life. They will rule over the nations forever and ever (Revelation 22:3-5). All the tragedies and nightmares of this age will be gone, even their memories. Never again will God be slandered. ☩



The Imaginer

Oh, I can imagine all right. I've always imagined everything.

My imagination was always running away with me.

And so it wasn't hard to imagine what John Lennon

and a lot of other people at the time imagined.

But there was just one thing about it that made

all those imaginings

just imagination.

They neglected the Imaginer

the Imager

the One in whose image they were made

the One whose imagination they were created in

the One who imagined them

before the world was

even formed

the One who *was* before the world was even formed.

HIM.

He is ... I AM.

Without Him they lack the essence of love,

the essence of joy,

the essence of peace.

They might have a man-made, human-fabricated

kind of love, joy, or peace,

but it will never be the real,

true essence of it

that can even reproduce itself.

Because it is not from the Source.

He is the Source – even of them,

the imaginers.

They don't realize that the only reason they can imagine

is because He imagined them into His image.

That's why they can imagine too.

Imagine

Imagine Him.
How vast His existence is!

Imagine how *long* He loved you for,
how *deep* His love for you is,
how *high* His thoughts and plans for you were,
to what great lengths He went through,
and is still going through, to show you
His love is for you.

Imagine turning your heart to Him, opening that rusty old gate
how much it would please Him
how much it would satisfy you.

From of old
He wanted to satisfy you.
He knows everything about you,
even now.



Imagine
Imagine all the people
living for today

life. I believed I was as free as it was possible to be in life. I believed that I had come to a point where no one could change my mind about the things I saw and realized about life. I found myself outside the mainstream of society and no longer needed to struggle against it. I didn't have as many disappointments anymore.

ANOTHER DEAD END

Then some problems started. I had always been able to sell my crafts wherever I wanted to and live without having to pay a lot of taxes, but suddenly the government started changing its laws. Even though I lived on top of a mountain without electricity, with only a donkey, some goats, and chickens, and drank the spring water on my property – now the government wanted me to *pay for using the water!* They even wanted me to buy some kind of insurance!

One day an airplane sprayed poison all over the fields in our area. It covered the trees and vegetable crops. It was a *new law!* It didn't matter how much we complained, we couldn't get them to stop.

I started seeing there was no way to live in peace. There was always someone or something that would happen that would bother my life and disturb my dreams. I began falling into depression again. Sometimes I would just roll up a joint and go up the hill, walking slowly, watching the beautiful trees and feeling envy for the wildflowers gently blowing in the wind. I would breathe deeply and look up at the sky and

say to myself, "Well, no one is perfect. Happiness is not the point. Stability and peace of mind are impossible to find unless you are absolutely dumb and blind to what is going on in the twentieth century."

It was hard to face the fact that I couldn't get back to a normal, natural, healthy life and be able to pass it on to my daughter. Although I tried my best, I couldn't find any peace. It was so sad to look at my daughter and know that there was no future for her. I knew that there was no point in trying to find utopia. It couldn't be found. In all my desperation and confusion, I knew my only hope was to find someone I could trust. *Trust?* I knew I couldn't really trust anyone. I had defenses. I used them all the time against people, especially people who came to push their philosophy and religion on me. What I needed was someone who would listen to me, who would know my heart, my thoughts, and all my inner desires – someone who would truly care about me.

SURRENDER

Finally I found people who I could trust! They lived together and had a true and genuine love for one another. They had the power to work out their differences without dividing from one another. They were growing in this love and increasing in numbers. It was working. It was real!

When I heard their message of love I was cut to the core of my being. I saw that the problem wasn't just everybody else's

selfishness – it was my selfishness! When I saw their life together, I no longer had any excuses. Hope filled my heart once again. They told me of the One who had rescued them from the separation and loneliness of all mankind. He was the Son of God who had become a man. His name was Yahshua. He proved His love by shedding His blood, giving up His life as a sacrifice to save us all. His blood now covers my sin and all the things that I did that my conscience told me were wrong. All the things that alienated me from Him and from other human beings and that were taking me to eternal death had to be forgiven.

ETERNAL LIFE

Our Master Yahshua

lived His whole life trusting His Father in heaven. He trusted even to the point of death. Because He lived His life in perfect communication and oneness with His Father, He rose from the dead and gave His life-giving Spirit to His people. I am convinced of this – I knew it was true when I saw His people loving one another. He gives eternal life to all who call upon His name, to all who give up their lives for Him.

He is not the god of eastern religions. Nor is He the god of Christianity. He is the God of Israel. He is gathering His people together to demonstrate to the world that



He is real. This demonstration is what will bring about an end to the insanity of this age and bring in the glory of the next. This demonstration is the only hope for mankind. He is now my life and my hope. His purpose is now my occupation. Our Master Yahshua is eternal life, the very life that comes from God that will go on forever. It is the new life that your spirit needs, the new beginning that washes away your guilt, the way to become new like a newborn baby.

Our Master said, "Follow Me," and if you really believe, if you really put your trust in Him, He will reveal Himself to you and you will be surprised, amazed, and thankful like you've never been before.

You will come to know

what true gladness is, *in this life*. You don't have to wait until you die. You don't need to learn and learn and learn in order to get to know God. Our Master Yahshua knows everyone on this planet. He is the Almighty God who can find His people. He found *me*, lost somewhere on a mountain, hopeless, living a life full of struggle and contradictions. He saved me. He set me free from my ignorance. Now I know my purpose. He joined me to Himself by joining me to His people. Now I know how beautiful, how sweet the life is with our Master Yahshua. ♡

Yahua

Imagine

Nothing to kill or die for



No Religion

*John Lennon saw that people would never be able
to share all the world as long as religion
continued to offer no real solution
to the problems of mankind.*

IS THERE A PLACE WHERE YOU CAN LIVE TOGETHER with other human beings in peace, where all the longings of your heart can be fulfilled? If this place has been lost, can it every be found again here on earth? If the actual Holy Spirit of the God who created us could be given to us today, we could experience true life, eternal life, actual community. But since no one we know has really "found it" in Christianity, what other choice do we have? Is there any other alternative?

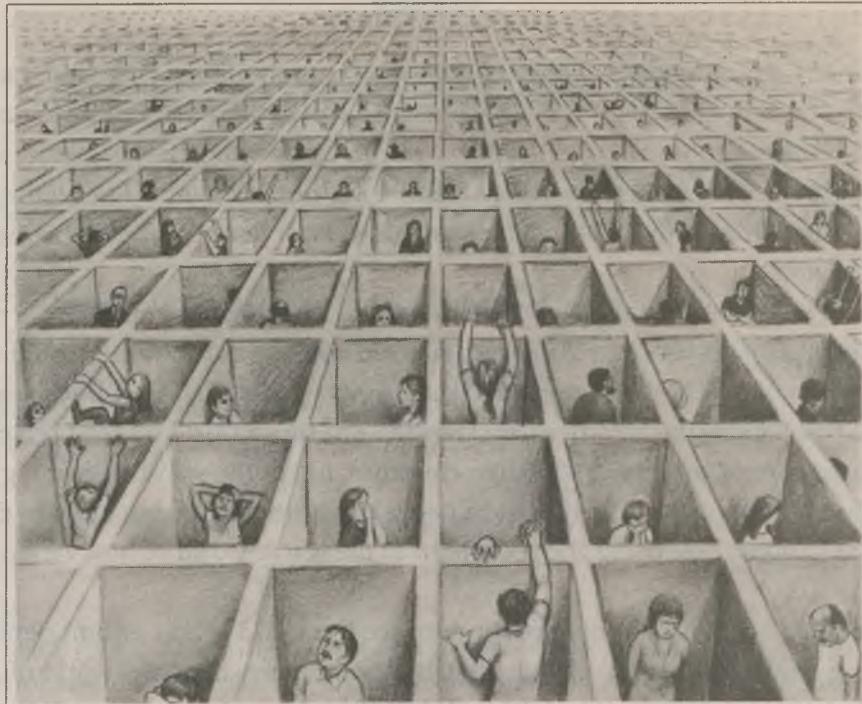
Many have had a testimony for a while in their little utopias. With great zeal and sincerity, they think they have found love and acceptance, sharing everything they have with others. They feel they matter to people, not for what they have done, but for who they are. They feel wanted, needed, appreciated, and seem as if they were never so happy. But sooner or later you hear about them dying from an overdose or getting burnt out trying to live together, unable to put up with the faults and attitudes of others. The result is a life scarred with bitterness and cynicism, alienated and retreating from the hope of ever being truly one with others.

DRUGS, SEX, AND ROCK & ROLL

The fried minds, wrecked emotions, and irreparable damage of our consciences that we sustained trying to come together is a proverbial testimony against the Christian church that did not provide the life of love and unity we needed. Since Christianity failed, as John Lennon could plainly see, drugs, sex and rock & roll were the only hope for most of us.

We were the victims of the empty promises of the Christian religion. If the confusing, backbiting, hypocritical life we saw coming out of these institutions represented

Imagine
And no religion too



We didn't want the selfishness and greed that divided all of mankind.

God, then we wanted nothing to do with that God. We wanted the real Spirit of the real Messiah who would make good His promises. We wanted the life of the people that was recorded to have lived in the first actual communities. If we could find this life, we would willingly accept this God.

All of those first disciples who believed were of one heart and soul, and not one of them claimed that any of his belongings were his own, but all things were common property to them. There was not a needy person among them, because *all* who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds from the sales, and give it to the apostles so that it could be distributed to each individual or household who had need. They were continually devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to fellowship with each other, and daily they ate their meals together, always full of joy and celebration. The result was that the disciples' lives affected all those around them to the point that every day new people were believing, giving up their lives to Yahshua, and being rescued from the abnormal society of their day. (Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-34)

Imagine

JUST A MYTH?

But since Christianity, who boasts of being the church of the living God, has proven that they have not obtained this life, we cannot accept their Jesus with his empty promises. Neither can we be sure he really came to earth without seeing unity in his followers. How could we even know Acts 2 and 4 was not just a myth like all the other myths in Christianity? How could we be sure this was not just imagined by some misguided dreamer?

We read somewhere in the New Testament that Christ's followers *would be one*, and that the world *would believe* that *the Son* actually did come to earth, if they could see a demonstration of love being perfected in their unity. (John 17:21-23). But since we didn't see this happening anywhere, we chose to imagine a world without religion, instead of our parents' miserable Christian churches, full of the selfishness and greed that divide all of mankind. If they couldn't get along with anyone but a few in their own congregations, how could they be a light to the whole world of how we should live?

In light of all this, it was not hard for us to see the world John Lennon depicted in *Imagine* as a valid alternative to Christianity. But twenty years later, the world of *Imagine* is still only in the imagination, and the world of Christianity continues to defile and destroy everyone it touches by greed and selfishness, divided beyond redemption. Christianity gave us more empty talk and subtle lies than communism or any politician we ever heard. Their preachers and teachers lied to us all of our lives, leaving us without hope. They presented a different gospel, another Jesus, a different spirit than the one who could truly save us. (2 Corinthians 11:4)

A ROOT OUT OF DRY GROUND

In order for God to restore something real, He must do it outside of religion, outside of Christianity altogether. It must be like a root coming up out of a dry and parched land. We believe this restoration is beginning to happen in our midst where actual community is coming about. From this root will spring forth a life that will produce a nation of disciples. The fruit will be real, a light so bright that it will reach the ends of the earth. The true Savior, our Master Yahshua, will make His name great among all the nations. He is proving himself to be real. Then there will be no excuse. Don't let Him pass you by! ☺

Imagine

No hell below us,
Above us only sky.



Eternal Death

All flesh is grass, and all its beauty is like the flower of the field.

The grass withers, the flower fades, when the breath of the Sovereign blows upon it.

Surely the people is grass.

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

Isaiah 40:6-8

LIFE IS PAINFULLY BRIEF. IT IS ALSO AGONIZINGLY BEAUTIFUL. Sometimes the most beautiful experiences in life are filled with the ominous presence of death. Behind the beauty lurks a hopeless despair, a feeling of helplessness and futility. Flowers fade, relationships fail, a sense of impending doom damns our every effort. *There's a thorn tree in the garden, if you know just what I mean*, Eric Clapton sang. The thorn tree is death.

THE THOUGHT OF IT IS HORRIBLE. It outrages me. It is so unjust – like a knife stab to the heart or the twist of a screw deep within. Think of it! One day you won't be on the earth to watch the sun come up in all its peacefulness or see the moon rising in the early twilight. You won't be around when the apple trees come into bloom and fill the air with fragrance, or when the lilacs come out drenching the evening, or when the daffodils cover the hillsides. The clouds will come and go and you won't be there to notice them. You won't be able to see the sparkle of sunlight on water or feel the raw saltwind off the ocean, or sniff the soft balm of melting snow. The seasons and life will run on without you. They will never halt and wait for you to be there. Is there anything more unfair than that? In all his wisdom, Shakespeare could only say, *Golden lads and girls all must, like chimney sweepers come to dust.*

IT ISN'T FAIR to have to lie beneath the ground year after year and miss everything. Death is horrid and ugly. Who wants to be a disembodied spirit, chained in the deepest recesses of the earth, held in agony by the excruciating, crushing loneliness? Who doesn't dread the stillness, the imprisonment, the horror, the hopelessness, the helpless despair? And the conscious waiting that would go on – every second of every hour, day after day, year by year? The torment of mind is acute; the pangs more fierce than losing someone you truly loved. Who can bear to hear over and over again the thoughts of his conscience, as it tells him about everything he ever did wrong? There is nowhere to go and no way to shut it off. All around are the clutches of hopeless darkness.

YOU HAVE THE CHOICE between eternal life and eternal death. Choose life! ☩

THEY HAD LOTS OF PROBLEMS. The homeless poor were everywhere. Diseases that they had never known before ravaged the nation. The stench of all the sick beggars in the city streets was enough to knock a person over. It seemed like they were cursed, forgotten by God. A few affluent religious leaders were saying that it was all because of sin, but nobody seemed to have any real solutions.

So what did they need with an idealist? What good did it do for some uneducated visionary to come along saying, "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh." Why hold out to people the promise of heaven on earth when it seemed the government was trying to make life hell with all its oppressive regulations? Surely no one would listen to this man.

BUT STRANGELY ENOUGH, people did listen. They traveled for miles just to see him. Maybe they just needed a little hope. Maybe it didn't matter that he didn't have any money to hand out or any social reform programs to propose to the government. Maybe there weren't any solutions, and all that they could expect was a fantasy of love and peace that would get their minds off of their problems for a little while.

The more popular he got, the more rumors circulated about him. They said that he was a healer, a miracle worker. They said that he was a zealot, advocating a new kind of government. They said that he was a devil, calling people to abandon their religion and follow him.

Eventually, he caused such a stir that some of the leaders began to be concerned. There might be riots. There might be government reprisals. A lot of decent law-abiding citizens might get hurt. All his talk about



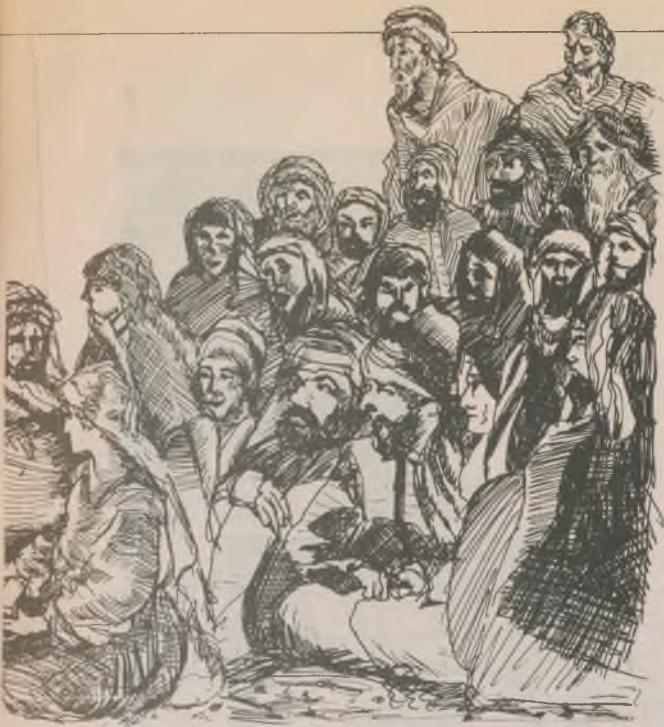
a government based on love might just be a front for an attempted political takeover, one that would surely end in disaster. Something needed to be done, so they did it.

They found someone to betray him, seized him in the middle of the night, and brought him to trial. Evidence was scanty and conflicting. His own testimony seemed to be that of a mere dreamer. "My kingdom is not of this world," he said. "If it were, my followers would be fighting to deliver me."

The judge handed down a bizarre verdict, simultaneously declaring the prisoner innocent and washing his hands of his death. After a tormenting six-hour-long execution, his brutally disfigured body was laid in the grave. To the thinking of most, both the dreamer and the dream were gone forever.

SEVEN WEEKS SLIPPED PAST, just as inconspicuously as his followers who had deserted him on the night of his arrest. Nothing was seen or heard of his cause.

Then suddenly, vividly they reappeared. Clear-eyed and articulate, full of peace as well as passion, these disciples testified to the



goodness and innocence of their Master, as well as the guilt of the nation and its leaders for putting him to death. But they weren't calling for blood. They were calling for repentance and forgiveness. They were saying that their Master's death was enough blood to be shed – enough to pay for the guilt of the whole world.

They were also saying that he wasn't dead anymore. They had seen him alive. He had gone up into the heavens to sit on the throne of the universe. He had given them his very own spirit to live in them and cause them to be just like him.

THE RESULT OF THEIR SINCERE, impassioned testimony was electrifying. Thousands cried out in desperation to be released from their guilt. They were each plunged into water as a sign of their cleansing and proclaimed to be new creatures with a new life, the life of a disciple of Yahshua, their slain and resurrected king.

The form that this new life took was even more electrifying. Every disciple was so concerned for the welfare of his brothers that he

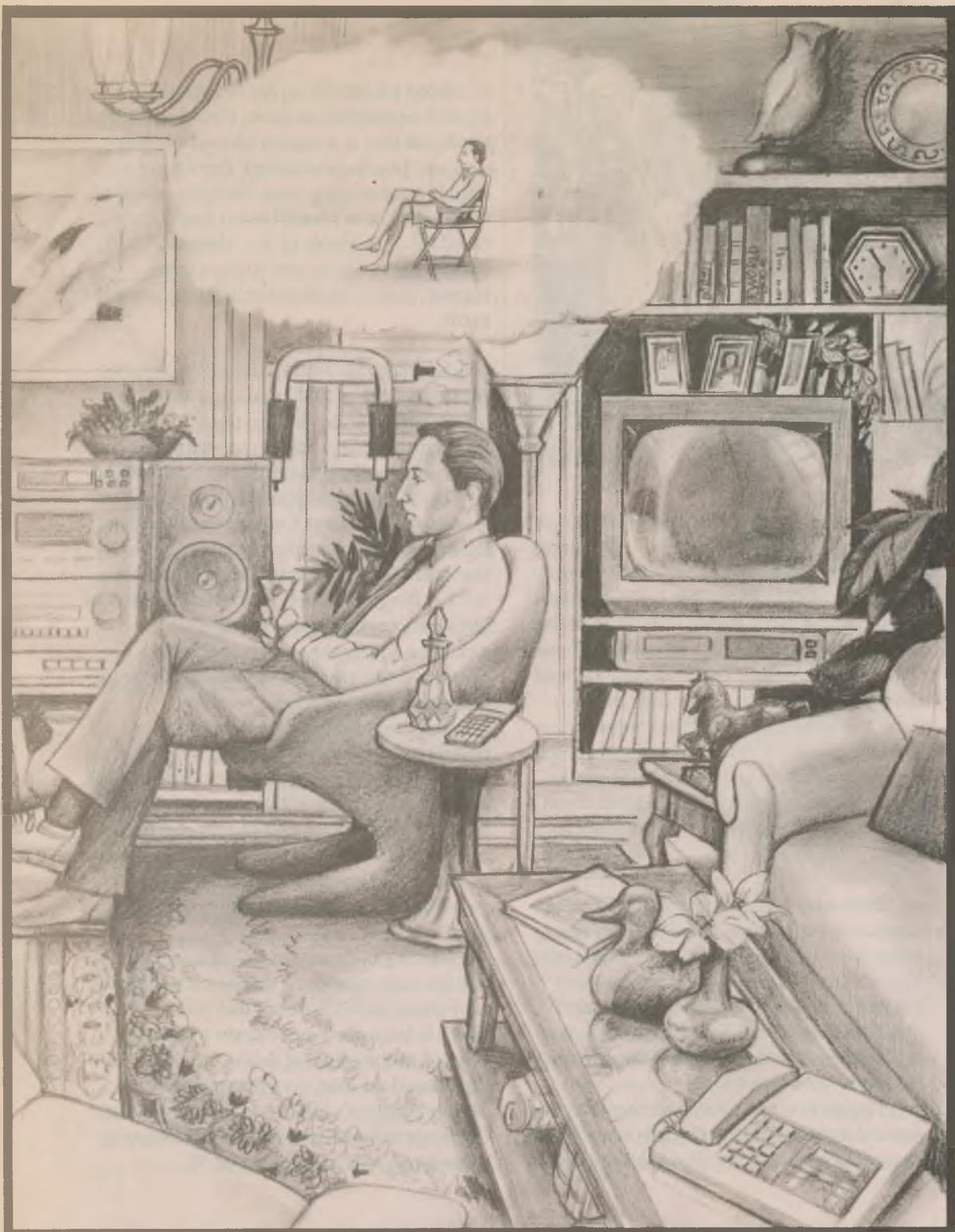
sacrificed his own time, his own goals, even his own possessions to meet their needs. The result was that in a nation where homelessness and poverty abounded, there were no rich or poor among these disciples, and each one had a home where he was loved and cared for. The words of the "dreamer" had come true: the poor and hungry were blessed. A new social order had begun on the earth.

HISTORY RECORDS THIS ENTHUSIASTIC communal life of 2000 years ago as a short-lived phenomenon. Before the end of the first century A.D. it had given way to factions and compromises. Roughly two centuries later it had been transformed into the state religion of the Emperor Constantine, bearing little resemblance to the vibrant community that had obeyed the commands of the Master. Nothing, it seemed, was left of the dream but a written account, carefully preserved by a religion that makes much of this man's death and resurrection but attaches little importance to his vision and teachings.

But the validity of the dream never passed away. A new social order where there are no rich or poor, where such divisions are abolished by love, is still the goal of this resurrected king who sits on the throne of the universe. His words of 2000 years ago still stir us today: "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom."

These words are true. God has gladly chosen today to give us this new social order, a kingdom which is not of this world, but which is beginning once again to be expressed in the midst of this world. It is a kingdom based on love, on the sacrifice of our Master Yahshua's life to pay for our guilt, on the outpouring of his spirit in our hearts so that we can love as he loved us. ☩

Imagine



Imagine

Imagine no possessions ...



I Wonder if You Can

FROM THE VERY FIRST SHOCKING WORDS, *Imagine there's no heaven*, JOHN LENNON HAD MILLIONS HOOKED. We were enthralled – *Imagine*, just imagine, *no heaven, no hell, no countries, no religion, no war, no possessions, no greed, no hunger, no strife, no division...*

What he was talking about seemed so close, just beyond reach. It would be paradise. Through what John Lennon proposed, surely mankind could finally get beyond the petty things that had so long divided the world. Why couldn't we share all the world? The prophets of this new world were already proclaiming the end of the old. They were striking at the heart of the old order: greed, guilt, and guns. "Wow, I've never heard anything like that before," was the normal reaction.

Once the music ended everything was still the same, but a seed had been planted. At least there was a future to look forward to. He gave us such a bold vision of a world where those evils had been done away with. If only we could have done it, then the true expression of human nature would have exploded onto the scene, destroying the old ways of strife and selfishness.

POSSESSIONS ALWAYS DIVIDE

John Lennon told us something fundamental about possessions. He was not the first one to see it, but what he saw was true. They are the outward expression of the division between people. One has much, another little, and between the two no brotherhood exists. He strongly hinted, though, that they would be hard to deal with. More than twenty years later, all we can do is agree with him. Possessions are very difficult to let go of.

Heaven was a lot easier to deal with, since it was obviously beyond reach. All you had to do was imagine it away. Possessions were different. You had the power to do something about them. It didn't seem to matter whether you believed in heaven or not. But giving away all you owned would have been more than just an idea; it would have changed your life. It is still such a radical change that almost everyone simply dies before they do it.

In *Imagine*, John Lennon asked us to hope that this selfish bondage of possessions could be broken, that somehow people would actually let go of what was their own to make sure that no one went without. But what would have happened if John

Imagine

*No need for greed or hunger,
A brotherhood of man.*

Lennon had given up all his possessions? Even if he was alive today, living his own private vow of poverty, *he still would have been powerless to bring about the brotherhood of man he longed for.*

The answer why is not hard to find. Who would have joined him? Would anyone have stayed with even John Lennon once the glamour had worn off, and the gritty taste of poverty had filled their mouths? John Lennon's powerful words, if we are to take them seriously, raise the question, *how do human beings change?*

IN BONDAGE TO POSSESSIONS

Are stirring words sufficient to break the bondage possessions hold mankind in? If love, and not fear, ruled the human heart, then everyone would share what they had, and there would be no more war. There would be no greed or hunger, and a brotherhood of man would fill the earth. It's clear we don't need the hope of heaven because it hasn't filled the earth with love. It hasn't even filled the churches. If it had, it would have been harder to imagine away the heaven of Christianity. It was clear that Christianity was as distant, formal and cold as its heaven. If that's all there was to look forward to, and lifeless Christianity all there was to be, then it was better to be an unbeliever.

It had been easy to reject the morality that seemed to go along with the whole notion of heaven and hell. The hypocrisy of Christianity was all the excuse we needed. So we hardened our hearts when the inner voice of our conscience warned us we were about to take away someone's dignity. We ignored our consciences in the search for sexual pleasure, wealth, even just acceptance. Doing away with morality only gave us license to hurt others. Little did we know we were pushing the brotherhood of man farther and farther away.

John Lennon, like many dreamers, did touch on things that were true. He hoped that the potential for paradise was in humanity already. It just had to be brought out, but he didn't know how. Because Christianity was nothing like the vibrant, living community that had once exposed the selfishness of the entire world, he



Imagine

*You may say I'm a dreamer,
But I'm not the only one.*

couldn't recognize that the Bible contained the actual blueprint of the society he was imagining. Sadly, he didn't learn from his refusal to give up *his* possessions that men and women are powerless to improve their basic nature. It requires an agent of change more powerful than self effort. Words, songs, philosophies, and revolutions have never changed the human heart.

In the end, he offered the world the same bill of goods Christianity has – that knowledge alone is sufficient to change mankind. All you had to do was imagine, and someday the world would be as one. But the power to make peace in every human relationship is only found in Messiah, who is the true *hope* of the world.

Love is not imaginary – it is real. Love is living the message you preach, not profiting from it. Love is laying your life down for your friends. That is the only way to know that you love someone. John Lennon was so close to the truth. He knew there was something critical about possessions. He knew that love was the key, *love is all you need*. But he didn't know where to find the love that would enable people to die to themselves and voluntarily give up their possessions.

It would have to be a love so vast that it could enable people to live together in peace, not divided by race, wealth, or education – that would be a true brotherhood of man. There is only one kind of love that can do that, the love that can cover the multitude of our sins. Every time we compromised what we knew was right and just, every time we treated someone in a way we wouldn't want to be treated, we sinned. Sin drives us away from one another and causes us to look out for number one. It is that tendency to selfishness that undermines our every effort to better ourselves or the society around us.

A WHOLE NEW LIFE

We don't need a new life just to smooth out our rough edges. We need one because of the guilt of our sins. It is Yahshua's great mercy that gives us the chance to be forgiven. He took upon Himself the penalty our sins deserved. Giving up your life now, while it is still yours to give, proves that you acknowledge God's justice and sincerely desire His mercy. It is not enough to realize that one day you will die. You must see that death is what you deserve.

Instead, Yahshua offers us a whole new life. His message is real and quite practical. No one needs a new life if he is satisfied with his old one. To those who desire a new life, He offers the same terms of peace He did when He walked the earth – abso-

Imagine

lute surrender to God's rule. This surrender is realized by obeying the first condition of becoming a disciple, "So therefore, no one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions." (Luke 14:33)

This is the time you can choose to leave your old, guilt-encrusted life behind. When death comes, it is too late. Then there is no chance to undo all the things you have said and done. It will be too late to find forgiveness for your sins. There will be no way to avoid eternal death. Only His disciples have eternal life. Yahshua understood the connection between possessions and a man's life. Eternal life begins when you voluntarily end your present, independent life. The visible sign of this is giving up all your possessions. They are the outward expression of your years on the earth, all that your talent, energy and labor have brought you. They represent your life. And for the man who has no possessions, he still has his own life, which he must surrender to be a disciple as well (Luke 14:26-33). This act of obedience brings you into the actual community of God. There, the life of love that once turned the world upside down is growing again. It is just a taste of all the goodness Yahshua has in store throughout all the ages to come for those who believe in Him. ☩



Imagine

*I hope someday you'll join us,
And the world will be as one.*



Terms of Peace

What king, when he sets out to meet another king in battle, will not first sit down and take counsel whether he is strong enough with ten thousand men to encounter the one coming against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still far away, he sends a delegation and asks for terms of peace. So therefore, no one of you can be my disciple who does not give up all his own possessions. (Luke 14:31-33)

Terms of peace with Yahshua, the Messiah, must be made while He is a long way off. He is coming to take up the rule of the whole earth. It will be too late to make peace when He returns with the mighty armies of heaven (Revelation 19:14). He will not be able to trust those who wait for the overwhelming display of His power before they will repent. Just like death comes to every person, and there is no way to avoid it, so the end will come to this present evil age. All those who persist in finding their life in this world will perish with it. But He will trust those who voluntarily surrender their lives to Him now, because they acknowledge their guilt and cry out for His mercy. They will enter the new age with Him, and they will never die.

The terms of peace themselves are clearly laid out in the Bible. They are just like the conditions exacted, or demanded, by a greater army to a lesser. Receiving those conditions are the only way to avoid its awesome power. Yahshua, the commander of the coming army, told us exactly what we had to do. He warned us that no amount of self-effort will ever replace obedience to His commands. We can not build anything on the corrupt foundation of our lives that will gain us admittance to His Kingdom. He said we had to hate our own life in this world and follow Him. He told us we had to die to everything that gave us life apart from Him – family, possessions, ambitions – and cling supremely to Him. We do this in His Body on the earth, the place where His Spirit dwells (Luke 14:26-30).

Those who obey His word and *actually* give up all they possess become His disciples. It is only disciples who have their sins forgiven. In order to have eternal life, you *must* become a disciple. ☺

A New Social Order



John Lennon imagined what a new social order would be like when he said, "Imagine all the people living life in peace." But a new social order cannot exist unless all the things that divide us can somehow be rendered powerless. If it were possible, then people would be able to live together in community, actual community. *Actual community* is real community, one that exists in reality, at the present time, where all of the people share a common life together.

This only happened one time, for a brief moment, in the first actual commu-

nity established by the disciples of Yahshua two thousand years ago. These men and women had life. They were forgiven people in whom all the barriers of sin that forever divide people had been knocked down by Yahshua's death on the cross. They experienced a *real common life* together. This was the life of love that shook the foundation of the old social order. A radically new way of relating to one another had broken into this age. Love was its essence, the kind of love that Yahshua demonstrated for us – one of giving yourself up, laying down your life

... A Radical New Way of Relating to One Another

for others every day.

When actual community ceases to exist, the new social order is held in abeyance. When we see people being real, being able to share a common life together, then we will know that this new social order is being restored here on earth. It is the seed of eternal life, the foothold of the light of the world.

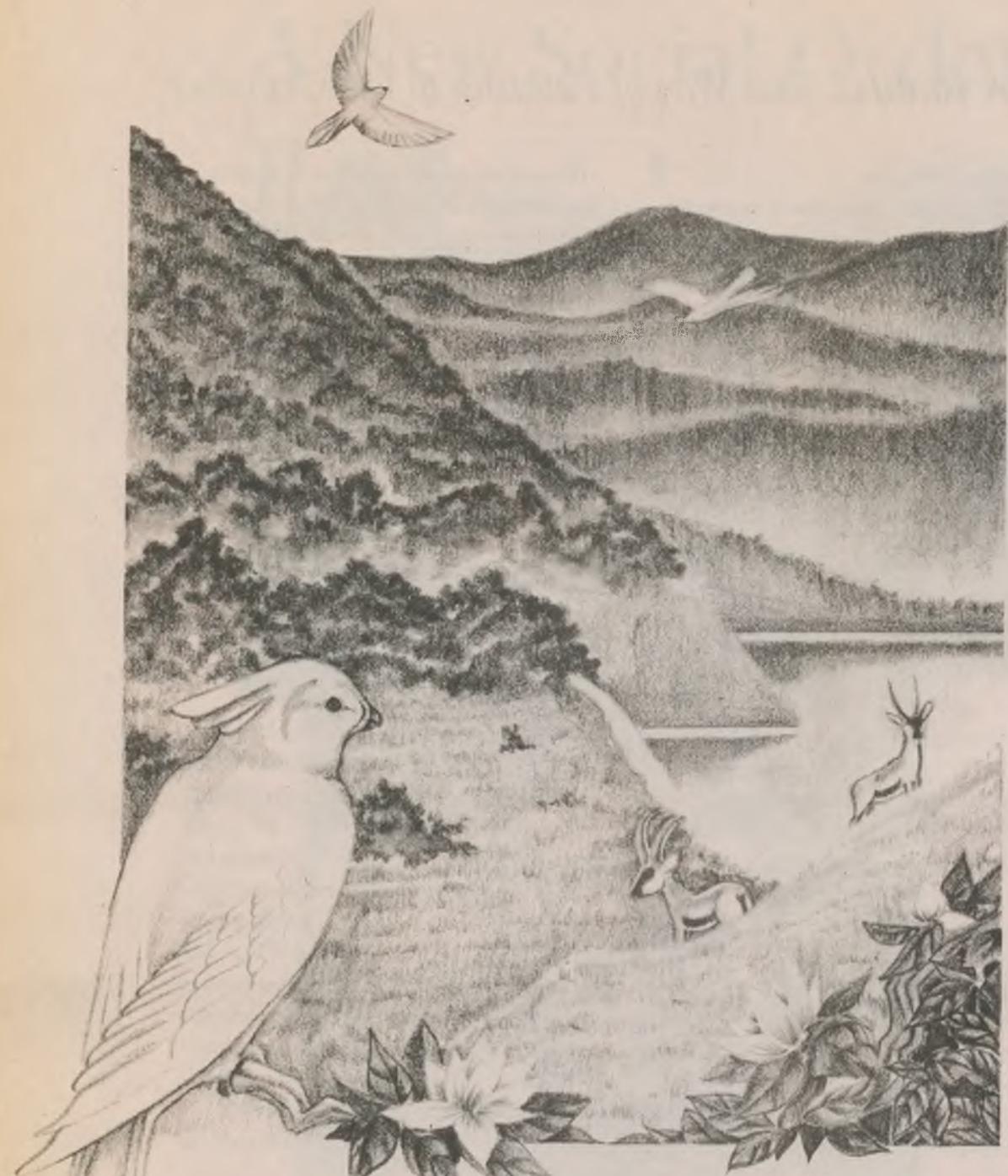
As the prophet Daniel foretold 2500 years ago, this new social order would be

restored on the earth without human hands. Its emergence is what will bring the old social order to its final end (Daniel 2:34, 44). Then the new social order will become a great mountain that will fill the whole earth.

This is what we are living for. It is what we were created for. It is the only hope for the world. We want to be real – *actual*. We want the actual kingdom of God to rule the earth forever and ever. ♡



Imagine



Imagine

No need for greed or hunger



A Brotherhood of Man

Where is the brotherhood of man that John Lennon imagined in his song? He extended the invitation, "I hope someday you'll join us." Where is the *us* of which he spoke? Where are the dreamers who have given up their possessions so that greed and hunger could be done away with in a brotherhood of men and women who share a common life together? And who is the courageous pacesetter who risked everything to bring about this brotherhood?

John Lennon was powerless to bring about the brotherhood of man that he longed for. The stirring message of his song could not take us beyond the life of the messenger who brought it, just as the profound truths of the Bible could not, by themselves, take us beyond the compromised religious system of Christianity that does not demonstrate the life it promises. The Christian gospel has been reduced to verses on bumper stickers and billboards, and *Imagine* likewise has been reduced to the sappy sound of *Muzak* in supermarkets and department stores. The message has no power without the messenger who is so enthralled with the message that he gives up his own life in order to make it a reality.

The idea of a brotherhood of man did not originate with John Lennon, nor did it die with him. It was born in the heart of the Creator of all things. From His fertile imagination He created man and woman to rule over His creation and to fill the earth with their offspring who would share all the world in peace, living each day to its fullest. Even though man has fallen from this created purpose, what is in the heart of his Creator has not changed. He has always longed for a people whose life is a demonstration of the love that is in His heart, a demonstration of justice and righteousness for all the world to see.

But sin is entrenched in the soul of man, and while there is a genuine desire for life in the hearts of many, the fatal blood poisoning of sin ultimately overpowers that desire. Man can never by his own strength realize his full potential as a human being created in the image of God. Selfishness and greed are so ingrained into his fallen nature that no amount of self-effort can consistently suppress them. Ultimately they rise up to rule the human soul and render futile any attempt to achieve a genuine brotherhood of man. The only way to achieve that brotherhood is to break sin's power.

Imagine

Imagine there's no heaven

DEATH

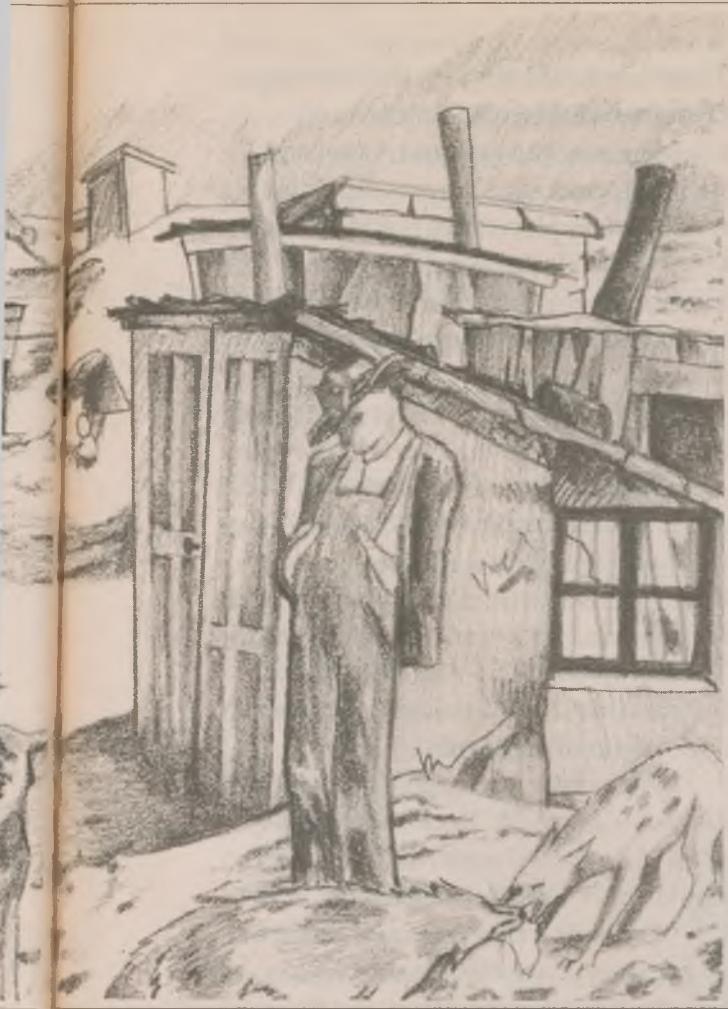
Death is the final outcome of the power of sin. Death is the consequence of sin, its fair wages. It is not just that our failure to attain to the brotherhood of man results in a somewhat less-than-ideal society to which we must all resign ourselves. Rather, the consequences of our selfishness, greed, and pride are the first fruits of death itself – alienation, strife, loneliness, depression, anger, hostility, murder. The decay of human society, which is evident all around us, is the sum total of the decay of the individual lives of which society is composed. Even the earth itself is defiled by our sin and increasingly becomes a hostile environment to the very creatures who were intended to be its loving caretakers. It is happening as the prophets have spoken:

The earth is also polluted by its inhabitants, for they transgressed laws, violated statutes, broke the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth, and those who live in it are held guilty. Therefore, the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men are left.

(Isaiah 24:5,6)



We cannot glibly settle for something less than the brotherhood of man – we must have *the real thing*, for our very lives depend upon it. Each one of us was created for eternity, and it has always been in our Creator's heart that we would have eternal life, an eternal brotherhood of man, and not the eternal death that we reap as the consequence of our sin.



That is why, even from the time of man's fall in the Garden, God had a plan to break the power of sin and bring about the true brotherhood of man, the new social order that has always been in His heart. In the fullness of time, He sent the *breaker* – Yahshua, His own son – who would break the power of sin and usher in the true brotherhood of man,

the kingdom of God. He was the true dreamer, the *imaginer* who not only had the true vision, but also the power and authority to make it happen. He *was* the Messenger who was so enthralled with His message, which came from the heart of His Father in heaven, that He gave up His own life to make it a reality.

THE CROSS

Yahshua hand picked twelve ordinary men, calling them to abandon their own lives so that He could pour His life into them. For three years they followed Him wherever He went, and hung on His every word. He taught them about the kingdom of God. He taught them how to love one another, how to lay down their lives for each other every day. He did not teach them a program of self-improvement, power through positive thinking, or maximizing their human potential. Instead, He said, "*If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it.*"

The *cross* was not an abstract concept to Yahshua's disciples. They had grown up under Roman rule and had seen men crucified. The cross meant death of the most excruciating nature. It was a means of execution saved for the worst criminals and rebels. Yahshua taught his disciples that the only way to deal with their fallen

human nature, the selfishness, lust, and rebellion that was in them, was to put it to death, ruthlessly. He taught them that a man cannot enter the kingdom of God without leaving the kingdom of darkness that he is born into, the domain of the evil one whose clutches hold its prey until death. He taught them that no one breaks free by his own strength.

WHAT DEATH IS LIKE

He taught them about death, where you are finally alone with your conscience. You are forced to face your sin, with nowhere to hide and nothing to distract your mind from the awareness of your own guilt. Every evil deed, every base thought, every selfish motive comes out of hiding to torture you. Like a worm burrowing into the recesses of your memory, eating away at your every excuse, so is the path of your thoughts as your conscience fully awakens. The unquenchable fire of your self inquisition leaves you either weeping in remorse or gnashing your teeth as you resist the truth about yourself.

Yahshua's disciples didn't understand many things He said. But they witnessed the purity of His life, His boundless love and kindness, His unbroken communion with His Father in heaven. They saw how He suffered and grieved over the hunger, sickness, loneliness, brutality, indifference and pride in the people He encountered every day.

Then they heard Him say that He would be delivered up to the Romans and would be mocked and mistreated and spit upon, and after they scourged Him, would crucify Him. They could hardly believe it. Was He speaking figuratively? How could He bring about the kingdom of God if He died? Surely God would not allow it.

Then it happened. One of the twelve betrayed Him into the hands of the religious leaders who were threatened by His teaching and the power of His love. They were after blood, and although the Roman governor proclaimed Him innocent, they chanted in unison, "Crucify Him!" The only sinless man who ever walked the earth was cruelly nailed to a cross like a vile criminal and died.

His disciples were heartbroken, devastated, frightened. They huddled together in a locked room for fear that they would suffer the same fate as their Master. What would they do now that He was gone? He was *everything* to them. They had given their lives to Him. For three years they had depended on His wisdom, His authority, His direction, His peace. Now He was gone. Where was He?

HE WAS IN DEATH

When Yahshua, the Son of God, was nailed to the cross, having no guilt of His own, He took upon Himself the sins of everyone else. He literally *became sin*. It was a spiritual event of inconceivable pro-

portions. That is why the very earth shook at the moment of His death, when His spirit and soul plunged into the very domain of death. For three days and three nights He endured the unimaginable agonies of death that you and I deserve. The purging of death was able to penetrate to the very core of His being, because there was absolutely no resistance in Him. Out of His infinite love for us, He willingly bore the guilt of our sins and received their wages. When death had exhausted its fury on Him, His spirit returned to His body and the earth shook again as He stood on His feet, forever alive. By His death and resurrection He had broken the power of sin forever.

Imagine the joy of His disciples when they saw Him again! It took several appearances in their locked room before they could all believe their eyes and ears. For the next forty days He taught them the things concerning the kingdom of God that they were never able to understand before. He taught them about the brotherhood of man, the new social order that they would become by the power of His Spirit. They would become His messengers to carry His message to the ends of the earth. He told them to wait for His Spirit to come to them, and then He ascended into heaven.

Ten days later the disciples were still together, about a hundred and

twenty in all, waiting in Jerusalem. Suddenly, with a noise like a mighty, rushing wind, Yahshua's Spirit filled the house and settled upon each one of them. The effect was electrifying. So great was their excitement that the whole city heard of it and gathered around the house. The disciples knew of nothing better to do than to speak to the people the message of eternal life that was burning in their hearts. Filled with Yahshua's Spirit, Peter stood up and spoke everything that was on his heart, and the multitude of people listened with rapt attention. His words convicted them of their guilt and their participation in crucifying Yahshua, the Messiah sent to save them. Pierced to the heart, they cried out, begging to know how to be rid of their guilt.



DYING IN BAPTISM

It was then that Peter told them how they could be saved from the perverse generation of that day and enter into the brotherhood of man that Yahshua was establishing on the earth. He told them that their sins had made them worthy of death, but that Yahshua, out of His incomprehensible love for them, had willingly suffered death in their place. If they would willingly surrender their old, rotten, sinful life and let it die in the waters of baptism, joining Him in death, then they would reach Him and have their sins washed away by His blood. Into their clean new life He would pour His own Holy Spirit that would seal them for eternal life and make them able to obey His commands and live a life of love in His holy brotherhood.

Three thousand people received Peter's words that day as if they had come from Yahshua himself. The disciples baptized and laid hands on them, passing on to them the very same Spirit they had received. The result is recorded in the book of Acts in the New Testament:

And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; and they were selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need ... They were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart ... There was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses

would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, and lay them at the apostles' feet; and they would be distributed to each, as any had need. (Acts 2:44-47; 4:34,35)

This life waned over the next fifty years to the point where nothing remained of its essence. What continued was the form, the dead institution that John Lennon despised – Christianity.

THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN

We are living in a day when this life, this brotherhood of man, is being restored from the righteous root of those first disciples of long ago. But it cannot be *imagined* into existence. You cannot enter it or bring it about by the strength of your will. It is not the product of a group of people with a common philosophy, who seek to refine their character, ennable their human nature, increase their self-esteem, subject their minds or bodies to a rigorous discipline, or pursue a political agenda. You cannot even achieve it by polishing up your behavior according to principles you can read about in the Bible. The only way into the brotherhood of man is through death – the death of your fallen, sinful nature. And the only way to bring about that death is to come to Yahshua, to His disciples who represent Him on the earth, and surrender your life as you are baptized into the life He is establishing right now – a foretaste of the age to come – Eternal Life. ☩

Imagine

Nothing to ... die for



MY LIFE ON EARTH SEEMED LIKE A BIG FAT ERROR. When the final fuse blew, I decided death was far better than this life. I went to the Pacific Ocean at sundown. I looked to the left and I looked to the right to make sure I would not be rescued. I couldn't bear the thought of someone saving me from the water, forcing me to go on living in the gloom of it all. My mind was made up, so out I drifted.

Though the tide was not high, I could still go far enough to give in to death. Yes, that's the answer, the solution to my misery. All I can find in death is peace anyway. Right? Here I go. Just relax. It won't take long if I just relax. So I inhaled as much water as I could until I began to fill up like a balloon. My head felt full of water and slowly I could feel the tranquillity of death coming upon me.

OH, NO! WHAT'S GOING ON? Before I knew it, someone grabbed me by my hair and yanked me back to shore. But no one, absolutely no one, saw me go into that water. I made sure of that. I would not have it any other way. It was a rescue squad, and off they took me to the hospital. All I can tell you is that the One who created me set up this whole rescue mission for me. He had hope for me. He saw desperation deep within my heart that I couldn't even see myself; in fact, I thought I would be doing Him a favor by ending it all. I didn't even know Him. I had Him pegged all wrong. I really thought that I had blown it so badly that He would re-

joice in my suicide. How gravely perverted my thinking and reasoning had been!

SINCE THAT HORRIBLE TIME, many wonderful things have happened in my life. I've been ransomed by a great and wonderful God. He changed me and made me completely whole. Because of Yahshua's death on the cross, He ransomed me from death itself. No longer am I hopeless, but my life is full of purpose and joy. It is truly a miracle. I have been released from my slavery to worthlessness. No longer do I listen to the voice that calls me a failure. I have come into an abundant life in Yahshua's kingdom.

I BELONGED TO HIM all along, but I never knew it. He longed to communicate this to me, but whenever He tried, I would block my ears. But at just the right time He tried again. I put my stubbornness aside and listened to His gentle voice through one of His disciples. He promised to help me and love me forever. The wonderful thing is, I believed him and here I sit today, a sane woman with peace of mind.

PLEASE DON'T GIVE IN LIKE I TRIED TO DO. His arms are outstretched, just longing to give you what He has given me – a brand new start. He is totally aware of you, so much so that His death was the payment for your ransom, too. Just come and believe, and receive the eternal life that begins now among His people. ☩

Ransom



Eileen

ACTUAL

COMMУИГЗМ

COMMUNISM

In Boston, the saying goes:

if a college student isn't a communist by the time he's twenty, there must be something wrong with his heart.

If he's not a businessman by the time he's thirty, there must be something wrong with his head.

People have known for years that the philosophy of communism attracts college students. They are

young and impressionable. It's not hard for them to believe in communism's promise that one day justice will come and that all the wealth will be equally distributed among men. John Lennon's *Imagine* song has a similar idealism. It makes its powerful emotional appeal to those same basic hopes hidden in the human heart. Listen to it again the next time it plays on the radio. See what happens. All you have to do is let go the reins of your heart a little and you'll find yourself being tugged in the direction of longing for a better world. Even for those of us who are older, it doesn't take much to get us thinking about peace and love. Most of us still have a vestige of idealism left – all we need is just the right song to get us going.

WHO WAS WORSE?

Back in the early 70's when *Imagine* came out, I was in college. At that time, we all dreamed our own *Imagine* songs. Mine was about what my friends and I would do if we were the leaders in power. We'd legalize drugs, end the military, stop the making of nuclear weapons; and the Soviets, eager to follow our example, in good faith would do the same. It fired my imagination and filled my soul for hours. Then I realized that my friends and I were just as corrupt as any other group of leaders that had ever been. What made me think we wouldn't be just as bad or even worse than the ones wielding power? With all the strife and selfish ambition going

on in us, we were bound to wind up making the world just like it is now.

FRANKIE & JOHNNY

John Lennon probably wasn't as naive as I was. He probably knew there was lots of garbage in him, too. After all, in the film *Yellow Submarine* there is a hint of that. As each of the Beatles makes his grand entrance, John makes his as Frankenstein. Nobody really knows it is John. Ringo and George are fumbling around in a dark room trying to switch on the lights when one of them accidentally pulls the wrong breaker. Suddenly electricity zaps Frankenstein's corpse to life. The huge monster lurches up into a sitting position and scares the poor Beatles half to death. Then as he downs a vial of strange steaming chemicals, something miraculous happens. Frankenstein shrinks down to become a normal-sized, dapper, and confident John Lennon. The film goes on but we are left to wonder where the monster went. Maybe Frankenstein was still around, waiting inside of John for the chance to reappear.

Whether that scene from *Yellow Submarine* was just a joke or whether John knew there was something monstrous like Frankenstein inside him will probably never be known. But one thing is for sure. Just as I realized that the arrogance and falseness in me wouldn't make the world a better place to live in, no matter how hard I tried, neither would the good intentions in *Imagine* do it.

Imagine

*Imagine there's no countries,
It isn't hard to do.*

No one can get rid of the monster inside of man by anything less than death. It is much easier said than done. I saw that one spring while visiting communist East Berlin. In a city of that size it's not easy to hide the ugly monster that lurks in man.

WAITING FOR PROSPERITY

Communist society has never found a way to change men's hearts. That's why, even there, men are overwhelmingly bent on satisfying themselves. In East Berlin I saw gutted churches and roofless museums that no one had repaired since World War II. Young married couples had to wait three years for an apartment, seven for a car. Housing projects were sterile – one identical building after another surrounded by bare ground and heaps of subsoil. No one had smoothed out the construction site and planted grass. Why? Probably because there were other more important things to do.

Why were police and army jobs the only ones people could move up in? Did men join the police force so they could guard the bleachers all along Karl Marx Strasse before the big May Day parade? Just like the construction sites in the city, everything would have been stolen by morning, even to the last nail, if it wasn't watched over. When evening fell, all the houses were tightly shuttered and not even a trickle of light escaped from within. All the sidewalks were empty, the restaurants closed, and no one dared to be seen

outside. Was it fear – fear of what lurks in other people? Though this cold, grey, coal-smudged city was the queen of all the Communist bloc cities, the mecca for tourists from all over Eastern Europe, there was no color or warmth or interest in people's faces. There was only suspicion and fear. If communism could ever deal with the human heart – the self-centeredness, the barriers, and prejudices – then it might have the chance of carrying out its goal of bringing peace to earth.

ACTUAL COMMUNISM

There is one kind of communism that does work. It is an actual communism that begins when the monster in the human heart has died. Just like a Frankenstein or a serial killer inside of each one of us, human nature has a criminal side to it that must be put to death before we can live eternally with other people in peace and unity. Many people try to gloss over the fact that human beings have a dark side to their nature. They pretend that it is not there, or that through education and social engineering we can eliminate all the evil things that are in people. But it is just like the kindly old farmer who found a stiff, half-frozen snake. He brought it home and placed it near his fireplace. As it revived in the heat, the snake began to move and eventually struck the old man. No amount of compassion could change the snake's nature or cause it to be kind in return. In the same

way, given all the right circumstances, the evil tendencies in us will also lash out and hurt others.

Something radical has to happen to the human heart in order for it to change. The most radical change it can undergo is death. When it dies, all the *evil thoughts, fornication, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness* in it die too (Mark 7:21,22). When our Master Yahshua talked about dying, he talked about going to death on a cross. "*If any man would come after me,*" he said, "*let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.*" (Mark 8:34) But what few people know today is that it is impossible to crucify yourself. You can put in all the nails, but you can't nail down the last one. Someone else has to do that for you.

THE DEATH BLOW

That's why we find eternal life in the place where there are others who have gone before us who are at hand to hammer in that last nail. The death blow comes when we go into the waters of baptism and end our self-centered, independent life once and for all. We find forgiveness there for all our sins when we cry out to Yahshua for a clean conscience. All the rotten filth that was taking us to eternal death comes to an end. There we reach the cleansing blood of our Master Yahshua and make our covenant with him – *to no longer live for ourselves, but for him who died and was raised for us* (2 Corinthians 5:15). The

moment we step out of those waters we enter into a life of actual communism and begin taking part in an entirely new social order. This new social order is a community filled with the love and care and warmth that are the earmarks of the eternal life of the next age.

ETERNAL LIFE

Through our daily life in the Community we experience a tiny bit of what eternal life is like. It is so rich, so vast, so deep, so inexhaustible, so unending, so multi-faceted, so fascinating, so exciting, so full of vision, purpose, wisdom, satisfaction, and meaningfulness it will take forever and ever to experience even a small portion of it. Who could ever think of missing it? Who wouldn't be excited to take part in it! Who has found anything better than it? The foretaste of it in our midst is everything John Lennon hoped to see on earth – human beings from every race, the strong and the weak, the rich and the poor, the educated and the uneducated actually living together, working together, and sharing all things in common. Here love breaks down all the barriers between men – the lonely find a home, the hurt find healing, the restless find peace, the unfulfilled find a purpose, and all the dreamers who never found what they were looking for can actually find the life that God wants to give them. It is not just for dreamers and idealists. It is for everyone. ☺

Imagine

I hope some day you'll join us



Who We Are

ISN'T THERE A TREE WHERE BIRDS OF EVERY FEATHER CAN FLOCK TOGETHER and find a nest, a place to belong, a home? Is living together close enough to really care for one another just an elusive dream? Will every attempt of diverse groups of people to live in unity of heart, mind and purpose always be destined for miserable failure? There is one network of communities here in the U.S. and elsewhere around the world where living together in peace and unity is real and is growing as a whole new social order.

As a tribal people who follow Yahshua, the Messiah spoken of in the Bible, we have been growing for twenty years. We are in New England, the mid-west, southern France, Brazil, Canada, and New Zealand, becoming spiritual Israel. We all work together to support ourselves, raise our children, teach them at home, and share a common life like the disciples did in the first century. (Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37)

What sets us apart from other communities is that we are not living just to have a nice, cozy, secure life in one of our communities. To do so would be selfish. We're not even living as we do to make the world a better place for our children.

Instead, our Master Yahshua has called us to give up our lives, in order to save us from eternal death and give us eternal life. We couldn't get this life by self-effort but only by absolute surrender of our sovereignty over to Him. In return, He gave us His life which is eternal life. Now, by the energizing power of his life within us, we have begun to experience this eternal life in advance of the new age to come as a witness, a signal, a sign and a standard of what it will be like then. So when the new age comes as a result of our lives together, we too will share in it with our Master Yahshua when He returns (Revelation 11:15). This is our hope and the hope of the whole world.

A NEW NATION

These tribal communities are becoming a nation that bears the fruit of what eternal life produces – love being perfected in unity. We have come together from many different nations and backgrounds, both religious and non-religious, to be a living demonstration of this unity that can only come about in Yahshua. It is possible now, in this life, but only because our Master has forgiven us of our sins by His Spirit, which enables us to live this new life now in this age, together.

Men were meant to love as our Master loved when He was on the earth. This is how we become friends. And if this friendship is rooted and founded upon true faith in our

Creator, and divine love for one another, it will endure. As foretold by the prophet, Ezekiel, birds of many different feathers will flock together to find shelter in God's mighty tree (Ezekiel 17:23). As Revelation 5:9-10 speaks of, this tree will be the habitation of men and women purchased by God from every race and every nation to be a part of God's kingdom on earth.

This life is coming into existence because God is doing something extraordinary in these most difficult and confusing days. His love is compelling men and women to give up their causes, their agendas, their possessions and all their ambitions to follow Yahshua, the Messiah, in obedience to His word. To gain this life on earth now, it costs you everything. Our Master offers eternal life which always brings a person into a common life, true fellowship with birds of every feather who will never leave you or forsake you.

SURRENDERING YOUR LIFE

Eternal life is a totally new life. To get this new life here and now, you must terminate your present independent life, come to Messiah's habitation, and surrender. In doing so, you will be immersed into a life together with others where you must be ready to be taught by God through His people, a whole new way of living, thinking, and being. If you want to save any portion of your life in this present social order, you will lose it, that is, you will go to eternal death. But if you are ready to lose your life, utterly abandon it, for the sake of Messiah and the good news we proclaim, you will save it, which means you will inherit eternal life (Mark 8:35).

Yahshua is the Son of God who died in our place for our sins. He suffered the death that we all deserve for the times we ignored our consciences. He knew the selfish center of man's heart, which is the root cause of all the massive problems plaguing the earth. He knew His people would sense their own personal guilt, their part in this destruction we see all around us. He knew they would want a way out, a way to be forgiven, a way to have a whole new existence. He knew they would be drawn to His love, the love that was demonstrated for them when He died on the cross. That's why anyone who *actually* believes that He died for their sins, will *actually* no longer live for themselves, but for Him, who died and rose again on their behalf (2 Corinthians 5:14,15). They will give all their possessions, and all their energy to see His people gathered together as one nation. Acts 4:32-37.

This, in a nutshell, is what we are all about. If you are looking for *actual* community, and the life we have talked about here stirs your heart and challenges your spirit, come and see. *Whoever has the Son has the life* (1 John 5:12). ☩

Imagine

*You may say I'm a dreamer,
But I'm not the only one.*



Dreamers

*To those who believed in the hope
offered in Imagine, we ask ...*

WHERE ARE YOU TODAY and what are you going to do with yourself for the rest of your life? Where is the same basic, unfulfilled desire in you, suppressed behind the pile of paperwork on your desk, or whatever busyness you fill your life with while you try to make it in the system you detested a few short years ago? "Too Idealistic," you say. "Impossible!" But you only say that because you did not find what was basic in you, what was real and genuine, what life was really supposed to be. No, you didn't find it when you were a dreamer, but there is still hope!

If the good news spoken about in the New Testament of the Bible were true, if we human beings could really be washed and cleansed of all the guilty stains buried deep in the recesses of our souls, then we could receive the life and spirit of the God who created us. It is by this life, this eternal spirit, that we could live together as one! The dream could become a reality, not just something to imagine. This hope of eternal life is the only genuine and living hope that we have.

The reality of the hope John Lennon sang about in the song *Imagine* can only be found in *actual community*. This community is described in the New Testament in Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37. It is also called the commonwealth of Israel in Ephesians 2:12. The life described in these verses sums up the life you always wanted but never found. It is real be-

cause the very love of God can be poured out in our hearts in Yahshua. His love makes it possible to have a place where people would share everything they have, becoming a true commonwealth, a place to belong.

A NEW MAN

In order for this life to come about, each individual would have to become an entirely new man. The man you are now, the old man, is corrupted inside, and it always surfaces, no matter how hard you try to suppress it or ennable it to make it perform better. Every dream of a new society has failed over this point, as the old man in each of us raises its ugly head and selfishly demands his due. In order to make any commune function the way the first one did in Acts 2 and 4, there has to be a way to get rid of that old familiar nature in you, and put on the new man (Galatians 3:27).

This old human nature is filled with lusts, which are fantasies that you are constantly trying to fulfill. Lust is the sway toward the falsehood in you. You will even deceive others in order to fulfill those fantasies. From this corruption in each of us comes the things which divide us and destroy our lives – greed, envy, jealousy, hatred, strife, ill will toward others and ourselves, treachery, slander, arrogance, unbridled sensuality, and many others. This corrupted old man represents all

Imagine

*I hope some day you'll join us,
And the world will be as one.*



mankind, the entire human race, including the whole of Christianity.

The new man, on the other hand, is the life or character of Yahshua himself, created in justice and peace. This life of the spirit is what makes us one with our Creator and with one another. It is what enables us to regard others more highly than ourselves and to lay down our life daily for others, being gentle and patient and forbearing with one another. This one spirit is the source of the passion we must have in order to guard and keep the harmony and oneness we have in the binding power of peace. The life of this new man is an actual community or common life with others. This life includes all who have totally died or given up their old life and come into Messiah, a partnership in a commonwealth or holy nation. (1 Peter 2:9; Ephesians 4:2)

Just think, here is the secret of living together with success, with no dismal breakup

to surely look forward to. If only we could have the power to lay aside falsehood and speak the truth to one another, knowing that we truly belong to one another, that we will never leave or forsake one another. But in order for this to happen, there has to be a beginning. I mean a new beginning where you could listen to a real or true preacher, not one on TV or in a church, but one sent to you from this actual community of people bonded together forever in love and unity, like the one our Master Yahshua prayed for in John 17:21-23. Such a preacher could bring you to the point where you could be sealed in your spirit with the very spirit of God who bonds you together in unity and peace with all those in every Community of Messiah. He gives you the power to overcome the forces of falsehood and deceit that once ruled your life. Romans 3:23; 6:23 and James 4:17.

TERMS OF PEACE

You must agree with the terms of peace in order to receive a new life. It is life for life. The life you've always hoped for, the one that will not disappoint you cannot be found any other way! It's as simple as this. Messiah died for all of us so that all of us who are alive will have the opportunity to live no longer for ourselves, but to fulfill the purpose of him who died for our sake and rose again from the dead. Therefore, if anyone is immersed into the life of Messiah, he is new creation, he has become a brand new person inside. He is not the same anymore. The old ways have passed away. The fresh, new life has begun. 2 Corinthians 5:15,17.

We write this so that you can see what you must see, in order to experience forgiveness. Now, after all your travels and all your trips and all your illusions and disappointments, you must now see the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the whole world and covers it with his blood and causes everyone of us to *know* we are forgiven. We must all come to know we are forgiven, so that we can forgive others, so that we can come together. But you can't get forgiven through trying to forgive yourself, through some therapy or psychology. You can never analyze yourself into forgiveness.

Forgiveness is a gift that is based on the deep price that was paid for it. It's not cheap. That's why it's eternal. True forgiveness lasts forever.

It's not justice that one would do wrong to his neighbor. But this injustice fills the earth, it fills every neighborhood, it touches every life. There is a penalty for this injustice and that penalty is death. Everyone who ever

did harm to his neighbor is guilty enough to die and must taste the horrible separation and confinement of death to pay for his sins.

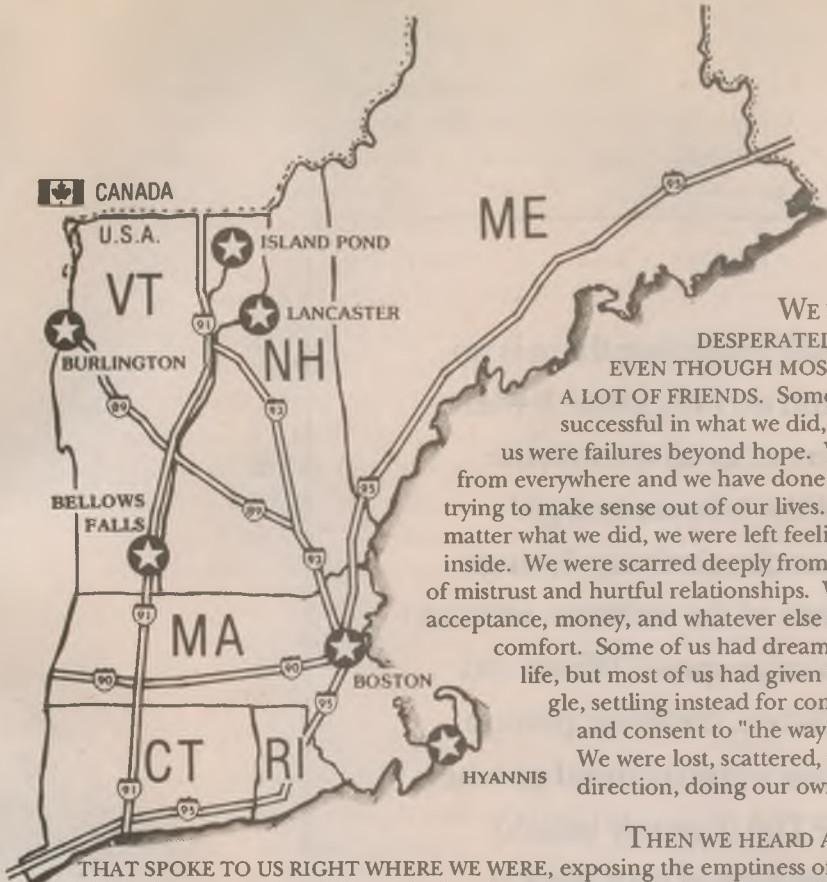
But the God of Israel provided a sacrifice for his people so they would not have to taste death. He provided a lamb, a choice lamb, the best lamb from each man's flock. When this lamb was slain, the guilt of the man was then poured out as an offering – a life for a life. The lamb died so the man could go free.

This always pierced the heart of the sincere because he tenderly loved his flock and especially his choice lamb. So, to kill it was a most painful experience. The God of Israel wanted his people to know the terrible cost to undo the effect of sin on the earth, to finally set creation free from its curse.

THE PERFECT LAMB

At just the right time in history there came into being an even more costly and perfect lamb than the very best of their flocks. It was the human lamb of God, Yahshua, our Creator's own son. He was the very best of the flock of humanity. In fact, He was the firstborn of a whole new race of unstained, guilt-free human beings who could love one another from a pure heart. He never did harm to His neighbor, but instead He was the ultimate example of how we should live. So this lamb, this perfect lamb, was slain for all of us, for all of our guilt. Belief in Him that causes one to give up all we have, even our own sovereignty and receive His life is what transfers forgiveness to us. It is life for life. His life for our life and our life for His life. We can be forgiven! This is how you can be free. This is the good news and it's meant for you. ☩

How To Reach Us



WE USED TO BE DESPERATELY LONELY, EVEN THOUGH MOST OF US HAD A LOT OF FRIENDS. Some of us were successful in what we did, and some of us were failures beyond hope. We came from everywhere and we have done everything trying to make sense out of our lives. But no matter what we did, we were left feeling dirty inside. We were scarred deeply from the effects of mistrust and hurtful relationships. We strove for acceptance, money, and whatever else could give us comfort. Some of us had dreams of a better life, but most of us had given up the struggle, settling instead for compromise and consent to "the way things are." We were lost, scattered, without direction, doing our own thing.

THEN WE HEARD A VOICE

THAT SPOKE TO US RIGHT WHERE WE WERE, exposing the emptiness of our lives. This voice matched up fully to the longing of our hearts. Somehow a lifetime of being unable to trust was shattered by this voice of hope. It came from a people who had their dirty conscience washed clean. They had a clean slate and an absolutely new life. This new life they eagerly offered to all who wanted it.

SO NOW WE HAVE A LIFE TOGETHER. We no longer have to be separated by race, education, appearance, position, status, or where we came from. Instead our days are filled with seeking first the needs of our brothers and sisters. In so doing, we find our own needs are met. This new life has given us the power to care.

WE HATE THE DEATH, WAR, STRIFE, HATRED, STARVATION, MURDER, INJUSTICE, GREED, AND SELFISHNESS that is leading the whole world to destruction. We want to see all of this come to an end. We want many, many more people to hear the voice of hope we've heard, to come and see the life. We are thrilled to be able to invite you to come and see that it's a reality.

WE ARE A MESSIANIC COMMUNITY AND BY "COMMUNITY" WE DO NOT MEAN A TOWN OR LOCALITY. Nor do we mean a loose association of individuals living near one another. And we surely do not mean a religious organization centered around meeting in a building, otherwise called a church. "Community" as we use the term means those who love one another so greatly that they are of one heart and mind, holding all things as common property, living together, taking their meals together, devoted to one another because they're devoted to the One who saved them from death and misery.

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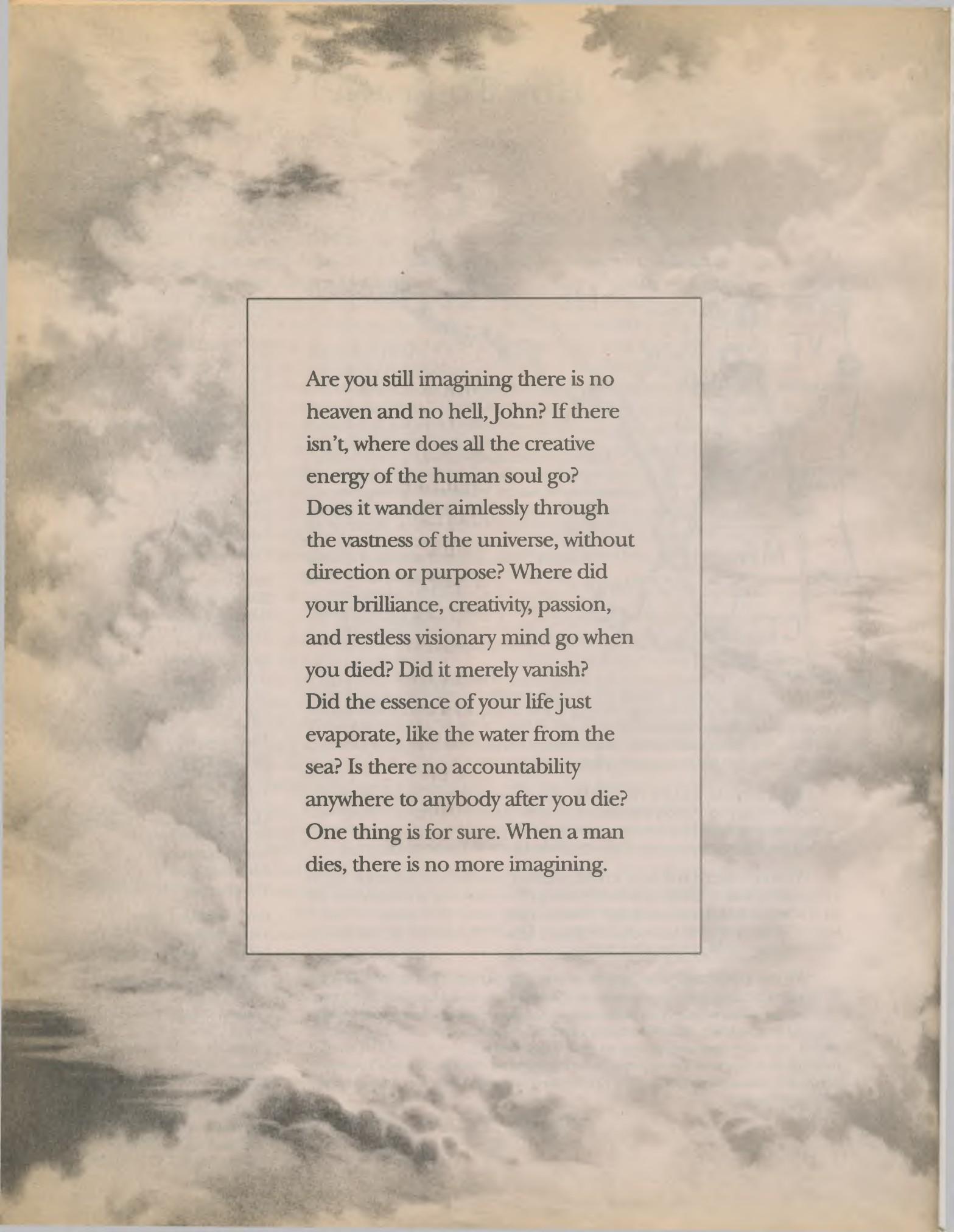
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Are you still imagining there is no heaven and no hell, John? If there isn't, where does all the creative energy of the human soul go? Does it wander aimlessly through the vastness of the universe, without direction or purpose? Where did your brilliance, creativity, passion, and restless visionary mind go when you died? Did it merely vanish? Did the essence of your life just evaporate, like the water from the sea? Is there no accountability anywhere to anybody after you die? One thing is for sure. When a man dies, there is no more imagining.